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Bible - Appendix
HISTORY
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OF

THE HOLY BIBLE,

INTERSPERSED WITH

MORAL REFLECTIONS

AND

INSTRUCTIVE LESSONS.

TRANSLATED FROM THE FRENCH,

BY THE REV. I. REEVE.

REVISED BY THE LATE

REV. WILLIAM GAHAN, O.S.A.

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PREFACE.

It is an incontestable principle, that a good education should be grounded on and directed to religion and morals, and that those to whom the instruction of Youth is committed should bend the minds of their pupils that way, and bring their lessons to these two leading objects and most essential points—since the end of a good education is to form the mind and the heart of man, and to prepare him, through knowledge and love of the duties, for a faithful discharge of them, in reference to his last destination. The editor of this compendious abstract of a more voluminous and expensive work in the French language, humbly conceives that the circulation of it will render service to his native country, and contribute, in some measure, toward promoting the great end of education, by diffusing a more extensive knowledge of the Sacred Oracles and sources of religion. The work here offered to the public, from its present form and small price, may be in the hands of every one, and is accommodated in an easy and familiar style to every capacity. Facts are herein related as they occur, according to the time in which they happened, and not according to the arrangement of books, as they stand in the Bible. The whole is interspersed with moral reflections, and instructive lessons, the perusal of which will not only serve to initiate youth in the knowledge of the sacred history of the Old and New Testaments, but likewise habituate them to religious ideas, and impress on their tender minds such important truths and salutary maxims as will inspire them, at an early period, with the love of virtue and the detestation of vice—and contribute, with the blessing of God, to purify their hearts and regulate their conduct at a more advanced age.

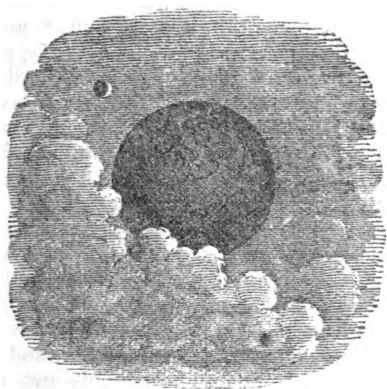
The Old Testament, whereof this is an abridged history, has passed from the hands of the Jews to those of Christians, upwards of eighteen centuries ago, and both parties acknowledge it to be authentic, sacred, divinely inspired, and the Word of God, dictated by the Holy Ghost. The sequel of facts, the prophecies, the miracles, the doctri-

the morality, in short, the whole bears the stamp of the Divinity. The same is to be said of the New Testament. Neither the one nor the other should be treated as a common history, nor be read as a romance for mere curiosity or amusement, but with the spirit of humility and devotion. The ingenious Mr. Benjamin Martin, in his preface to the Introduction of the English Tongue, laments and censures the profanation of putting this sacred book into the hands of every bawling school-mistress and thoughtless child, to be torn, trampled upon, and made the early object of their aversion, by being their most tedious task, and their punishment; insomuch, that it is to be feared, many of them carry with them, during life, a secret disgust for a book which fatigued them in their infancy; not unlike the disgust which is often taken to medicines, wholesome indeed in themselves, but disagreeable. And really if we are bound to honour the name of God and all things which belong to religion, is not a respect due to the Word of God. The Mahometans pay the highest reverence to their fabulous Koran, and shall Christians be allowed to abuse and profane in a sacrilegious manner the true Oracles of the living God? Where the respect due to these divine books is secure, the Catholic Church leaves them open to all, and recommends the reading of them. Her religion fears not being known, as it teaches nothing but what will bear the full light. She puts the Holy Scriptures, translated into every language, into the hands of the laity, for their inspection and perusal; provided it be done with docility, submission, and advice—and that the illiterate be guarded against the fatal presumption of interpreting the obscure and difficult passages therein contained according to the wild imagination of their own private spirit. The endless divisions of those who have followed that false rule, and who, according to the remark of St. Augustine (Trac. 18, in Joan), have drawn erroneous doctrines from the good Scriptures not well understood (as the spider draws poison from the very same flower that the bee sucks honey), are sufficient to justify this prudent precaution.

HISTORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

AGE I.

From the Creation of the World to the Deluge, containing the space
of 1656 years.



GOD having decreed to make the world, as he has, out of nothing, created in the beginning a vast and indigested mass, as it were, of matter without form, dark in itself and void of all that order and beautiful variety of parts which appeared soon after. The holy Scriptures expressly

say, that Almighty God perfected this great work in six days. On the first, after having created the Heaven and Earth, he made the light. On the second day, he made the Firmament, to which he gave the name of Heaven. On the third, he separated the dry land from the waters, that were mingled with it; the waters he collected together, and called them the Sea. He then commanded the earth to produce the different sorts of plants and fruit-trees, with their respective seeds in them, for the re-production and increase of each in its own kind. On the fourth day, he made those great luminaries that shine in the firmament of Heaven, the sun, moon, and stars; ordaining at the same time that the sun should preside over the day, and the moon over the night; that by their stated revolutions they should also regulate the days, the months, and seasons of the year. On the fifth day, God extended his creative power from the inanimate to the animated part of the universe. From the waters he produced an innumerable variety of creatures, containing within themselves the principles of life and motion; fishes of various size, and birds of every kind, which he blessed, and bade to increase and multiply, commanding them to people the air and the watery deep. On the sixth day, he commanded the earth to produce, not plants and trees, as it had already done, but animals and living creatures of every species. He chose likewise on the same day to create Man, the last and most perfect of all his works: for of so many excellent beings which he had formed, Man was the only one capable of knowing and of loving his Creator; and therefore for man were they all created. The creation being thus perfected, God.

on the seventh day, ceased from doing anything more ; for which reason that day was then consecrated to the divine service, and appointed to be kept holy in future times.

Such is the account Moses has given us of the creation, in which we find no mention made of the angels ; but as those pure spirits do most certainly exist, the holy Fathers are of opinion, that they were created by Almighty God when he spoke these words, *Let light be made* : and in consequence, St. Austin understands that separation which God made of the light from darkness to express also a division, which he at the same time made of the good angels from the bad. Thus from the first existence of the world, and in the most excellent of his creatures, it pleased the divine wisdom to let us see that none can be happy who separate themselves from God ; that to whatever degree of greatness or of glory they may be raised, they must still remain subject to their Creator, since nothing can screen them, if they transgress, from the justice of an offended Deity ; therefore, as by the example of the good angels, we are encouraged in that indispensable duty of fidelity, which we owe to our Creator, so at the remembrance of those fiery torments into which the rebel angels have been thrown, we must undoubtedly conclude that God resists the proud and gives grace to the humble.

Adam placed in the earthly Paradise : formation of Eve. Gen. ii.

THE heavens and the earth being made complete with all their ornaments, and the man who had been formed out of the earth, being moreover dignified with a spiritual and immortal soul, ac-

According to the image and likeness of his Maker, God constituted him the master of the universe, and placed him in the terrestrial Paradise. Paradise was the seat of all earthly happiness, a garden teeming with delights, planted by the hand of God himself, and adorned with every produce of nature that was pleasing to the taste and charming to the eye. In the middle of this garden was a tree, called the Tree of Life, and near it grew the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Here it was that God placed the first man, not to be an idle inhabitant, or a mere spectator of the place, but to keep and work it, as the Scripture particularly specifies. But lest in the midst of such delights he might unwarily forget his divine benefactor, on whom he solely depended for the enjoyment of them, Almighty God restrained him in one particular point, and thereby gave him an opportunity of showing at once his obedience and his gratitude. The precept was but one; it was an easy and a just precept. 'You may eat,' says God, 'of every tree, that grows in Paradise excepting that of the Knowledge of good and evil: that tree alone you must not touch; or if you do, you will most assuredly die in punishment thereof.' He then made all the living creatures pass in review before Adam; and Adam (for so the first man was called) gave to each a name, expressive of the nature and qualities which each species of bird and animal was possessed of. Amidst such a variety of living creatures he saw none equal to himself, nor was there one endowed with reason to whom he could speak his thoughts. He fell asleep, and during his repose God took out one of his ribs, which he formed into a Woman,

filling up the vacant space in his side with flesh instead of bone. Adam no sooner saw her, but, struck at her charming figure, with ecstasy cried out, "This is the bone of my bone and the flesh of my flesh!" For this reason the husband in future times shall leave his father and mother to cleave to his wife, and they shall be two in one.

In the first Adam, Almighty God has given us a most palpable mark of what was long after to happen in the second; and the holy Fathers tell us, that the mysterious sleep of Adam was a figure of the death of Jesus Christ upon the cross. For then it was that the Church was formed by our divine Saviour; and the water and blood which issued from his gaping side, mark the source from whence the Sacraments of the new law derive their power to heal and cleanse our souls. This heavenly bridegroom having in some sort left his Father in heaven, came in human shape amongst us, to unite himself eternally to his Church, the spouse he had taken upon earth; and having made us worthy of contracting so ineffable an alliance with him, he most truly says of his Church what Adam said to Eve, "Behold the flesh of my flesh, and the bone of my bone!"

The fall of Adam. Gen. iii.

SCARCE had Adam and Eve begun to enjoy the delights of Paradise, when the Devil, who had been already ruined by his pride, resolved to try his utmost malice against them: he resolved to deprive them at once, if he could, both of their happiness and innocence. He was galled with envy to see two creatures, whose low beginning

was from the slime of the earth, thus blest and happy in their fidelity to God, while he, an original inhabitant of heaven, was thrown down into the lowest disgrace and misery. He, therefore, began to execute the ruinous design which he had formed against them, and undertook to destroy the succeeding race of mankind in the very root. For this purpose he made use of the Serpent, which of all animals was the most subtle; and not doubting but the easiest and most certain way to succeed would be to seduce the woman first, he thus expressed himself to her: "Why has not God permitted you to eat indiscriminately of all the fruit of this garden?" "He has," replied Eve: "we eat of every fruit in the garden except one, and that one God has forbidden us to touch, lest we die."—"It is not the fear of your dying," answered the Serpent; "it is the apprehension of your knowing too much, which has induced God to lay such a restraint upon you; for he knows that by eating of this fruit you will not die, but that your eyes will be opened, and you yourselves will become as gods, like him, having the knowledge of good and evil." Eve, instead of turning away her ear, as she ought, from such deceitful language, not only listened but was even pleased with her seducer. She was flattered with his promise; she sucked the poison of his words into her very soul; she looked earnestly at the fruit, and concluding it to be as delicious to the taste as it was delightful to the eye, she put forth her hand, she took it, she eat of it.—Thus was Eve gradually led to transgress the command of her Creator, and thus did sin enter into the world. For no sooner had she herself eaten of the forbidden fruit but she offered it to her husband, and he did also

eat thereof. Rather than be the cause of any uneasiness to the spouse he loved, he chose, by a sinful compliance, to renounce the fidelity which he owed to his Creator, and thereby betrayed a want of that manly virtue, even in Paradise, which Job in after times so gloriously displayed upon his dunghill, as the Fathers remark.

This is the transgression, of which death, and all the train of human miseries, is the fatal consequence. This is the sin, too enormous in its guilt for words to express, since in the father it ruined his whole posterity. Sprung from rebellious parents, we are born the slaves of Satan ; nor should we have ever had the possibility of recovering our forfeited inheritance, had not God himself become our deliverer. The greatness of so unmerited a mercy ought never to be forgotten by us ; as on one hand it challenges our most grateful acknowledgments to God, so, on the other, it admonishes us to be always upon our guard against every temptation of the old serpent. That malicious enemy of mankind still remembers, and still practises, the same wiles, that succeeded once so well with him in Paradise. By a thousand ways he daily tries to persuade us, that we may innocently follow our own inclinations, even against the express commands of God our Creator. But as Eve by experience found the threats of God to be as certain, as the promises of the serpent were deceitful, so we always should remember, that God is still as unchangeable, as he was then, in the commands he gives ; and that the specious interpretations we may be tempted to make, in order to elude their force, are no more than the artifices of a subtle enemy, endeavouring to impose

upon the children, as he once did upon their parents.

Punishment of Adam. Gen. iii.

By the fall of our first parents vanished the pleasing prospect of their happiness. Being stripped of their original innocence, they for the first time perceived that they were naked. For while their minds were unstained with sin, and the appetite of their senses remained subject to reason, they had known no cause of shame; but shame now followed the inward consciousness of guilt, and made them blush at what they had not observed before; for which reason they girded themselves round with fig leaves, finding a total change was wrought within them—What had hitherto been their joy, began to alarm and terrify: they heard the voice of God walking in the garden; it was no longer the voice of gladness, it was the sound of terror in their ears: they ran off, and hid themselves, trembling with fear, among the thickest of the trees. God called upon Adam, by name, and asked him, where he was? “I heard your voice,” said Adam, “but was afraid of being seen by you on account of my being naked.” Adam mentioned not the real reason of his fear, but soon found that it was in vain to dissemble with an all-knowing God. Being severely reprimanded for his disobedience, which was the real cause of his blushing and confusion, he began to exculpate himself upon the weak, but cruel pretence, that the woman had first offered the fruit to him. The woman, hearing herself thus accused, sought also in the same manner to shift the blame from herself, and fix it upon the serpent that had deceived her. But in a

formal violation of his precepts, God admits of no such excuses: he cursed the serpent upon the spot, as the prime promoter of the sin, condemning him to creep upon his belly along the earth, and to eat of the dust thereof all the days of his life; and concluded by pronouncing his disgrace and final overthrow by the woman, who in her seed should hereafter crush his head. He then addressed himself to the other two offenders that stood before him, and sentenced them both to the most afflicting penalties, which their posterity severely feel to the present day. He told the woman in particular, that he would multiply her sufferings: that in bringing forth children she should groan with pain, and be for ever subject to her husband's power. To Adam, he said, that since he had preferred the woman's voice to the voice of God, the earth should be cursed on that account; that notwithstanding his hard labour to render it fertile, it should produce him briars and thorns; and that by the sweat of his brow he should earn his bread, until he returned to dust, from whence he had been taken. After this he clothed them with the skins of beasts, and to make them still more sensible of their sinful folly, he ironically exclaimed, "Behold! Adam is become like one of us; by experience he has now the knowledge of good and evil. He never shall come near the Tree of Life, lest he should be for eating also of that fruit and live for ever." God therefore drove them out of Paradise, and at the entrance placed a cherub with a fiery sword, to prevent their return.

Thus were our unhappy parents compelled to quit that garden of delights; thus were they sent out to bewail their miseries in a desert land,

where they met with nothing but the melancholy marks of their own disobedience. Their ideas of the happiness which they had just lost were fresh in their minds ; and having now the experience of evil, which in the state of innocence they had never known, they could not help making a comparison between the two extremes. The first light of natural knowledge was not yet extinguished in them ; their notions of good and evil were more clear than any man can now form ; the more sensible therefore was their affliction to see themselves so miserably fallen from what they were. Their hearts were ready to burst with grief at the prospect of so many of their helpless children, who were eternally to perish on their account. For having once consented to the sin, they could not possibly prevent the fatal consequences of it. However exemplary their penance may have been, it could not of itself save either them or their children. The work of their salvation, moreover, required the gr ace and mediation of a God made man, whose merits should be equally infinite with his mercy. This Jesus Christ has done for them and us ; and he has done it in so wonderful, and so plentiful a manner, that with the Church we may call the sin of Adam in some sort a necessary sin, and a fortunate transgression. This is the redemption, which our first parents hoped for ; this was the thought that comforted them in all their miseries.

Abel slain by his brother Cain. Gen. iv.

ADAM soon after his fall began to increase his family ; the first of his sons was called Cain, and the second was called Abel. Cain soon

showed himself to be of a very jealous temper, naturally rough and violent; he employed his time in working and tilling the ground. Abel was more meek: his natural turn of mind led him to the more gentle exercises of piety in the employment of a shepherd. Both being instructed in the duties of religion, they both worshipped the Supreme Being by religious sacrifice; the one offered to God the best and the fattest of his flocks, the other presented him with the first fruits and gifts of the earth. But as their offerings were made with very different dispositions of the heart, so very different likewise was the acceptance they found in the divine sight. It stung Cain to the very quick to see the preference given to his brother; his countenance fell, and a discontented gloom expressed the rancour of his heart. The piety of Abel was the great cause of his uneasiness, and a brother's good qualities, which he himself was wholly void of, stirred up his envy into a most violent hatred: it was the beginning of what has happened in every subsequent age of the Church, where the good and virtuous are obliged to bear the unjust censures and aversions of the wicked, with whom they converse. God himself was pleased to speak, in order to gain the heart of that wretched man. He asked him why he let himself be carried away by passion? Why he was cast down, and why he fretted at what did not concern him? "Thou art accountable only for thy own actions," said God to him, "whether good or evil: if they are good thou shalt have thy reward: but if evil thou alone must bear the guilt of thy sin." The divine admonition was without its effect; for, as St. Gregory observes,



the word of God, which is so sovereign a remedy against every other distemper of the soul, cures not the secret wounds of envy, when applied to them : it does but exasperate instead of healing. Cain had worked his passion up to its full height: being bent upon acts of violence, he invited his harmless and unsuspecting brother to walk out with him into the fields, where he violently attacked and killed him upon the spot. Horrid as the action was, the murderer was too hardened in his guilt to be shocked at it. God soon after asked him what was become of Abel? He insolently answered, that he did not know, neither was he his brother's guardian. But to convince him, that nothing can escape the eye of an all-discerning Providence, God told him, in reply, that the blood of his brother Abel cried to heaven for vengeance against him ; that he should therefore be accursed upon the earth, that he should shun the society of men, and live a vaga-

bond all the days of his life ; giving an example to future ages of the vengeance due to all who unjustly shed their innocent neighbour's blood, or by enmity murder him in their hearts.

The holy fathers consider the death of Abel as a figure of the death of Jesus Christ : and his sufferings as a beginning of those persecutions, which the faithful in all ages were to bear from their jealous brethren. Therefore, the true followers of their divine master are not afraid of being exposed to the injustices of a persecuting world, knowing that if their sufferings are great, great also will be their reward ; and that to repine at the first, would be to make themselves unworthy of the second.

Noah's Ark. Gen. vi.

THE descendants of Cain inherited their father's spirit, and became a very wicked race of men : the sins of the earth increased in proportion with the number of its inhabitants. About the time of Abel's death, God had given to Adam another son, whom he named Seth, and whose descendants for their piety are, in the holy Scripture, called the sons of God ; till, falling in love with women of the race of Cain, they also were corrupted like the rest. In process of time, their wickedness became so great and universal, that scarce any remains of virtue could be discovered in them. The marks of original righteousness were either worn away by neglect, or disfigured by vice. Man, the visible masterpiece of the creation, was so far degenerated from his first state, that he seemed a disgrace

even to the creatures that had been made for his use and benefit. The Lord repented, as the Scripture expresses it, and was sorry for having made him : he resolved to sweep him off the face of the earth, and with him all the living creatures that had been made for his service. Amongst so many thousands of men that were then living, only one was distinguished for his innocent and spotless life. Noah was this man ; who being in favour with his Creator, had the happiness to be chosen by him for the restorer of a future race, when the first should be destroyed. To Noah therefore, did God communicate the resolution he had taken of destroying the world by an universal deluge ; and as he intended to show mercy to him and his family, commanded him to build an ark, according to the dimensions he then gave him. Noah set immediately to work, and was a hundred years in completing it. During that time men saw the preparations he was making, and could not be ignorant of his design ; they undoubtedly heard the divine threat, but did not apprehend it would fall so heavily : they considered it as a distant evil, and being wedded to their passions, either would not believe or did not regard it.

Strange as the insensibility of these antediluvians may appear, it is no more than what will again happen in the latter days, as our blessed Saviour tells us in his Gospel. As suddenly and unexpectedly as the deluge, the last judgment will likewise come upon the world. In compassion to mankind, Almighty God threatens, long beforehand, that the fear of punishment may make them studious to prevent it : for he never

punishes but with regret, and when the impenitence of sinners provokes his severest anger. He cannot with indifference see his threats disregarded, his admonitions slighted, and his mercy abused. Men must not fancy that their numbers, or their wealth, or worldly power, will be able to screen them from the vengeance that their crimes deserve. When summoned to appear before the tribunal of an omnipotent Judge, they will find that the whole world will be as little able to stand against the fires of the last day as against the waters of the deluge.

The Deluge. Gen. vi.

THE fatal period fixed for purifying the earth by water being at hand, God commanded Noah to take of every kind of bird and animal, male and female, seven couple of those that were clean, and one couple only of such as were unclean, and to convey them into the ark, with provisions of all sorts sufficient for a twelvemonth. These orders being executed, Noah and his wife, with his three sons, Sem, Cham, and Japheth, and their three wives, entered into the ark, and according to the Scripture phrase, God fastened close the door on the outside. At that moment the cataracts of heaven were opened, and an incessant deluge of rain was poured out with great violence for forty days and nights together. The earth soon disappeared, and the sea was no longer distinguished by any bounds; the inundation spread itself impetuously above everything, till the surface of the waters was fifteen cubits higher than the highest mountains. Birds, animals, and men were swept away by the torrent, and lay buried beneath the

deep; and excepting what were in the ark, all perished without distinction. The ark in the mean time rose with the rising flood, and rode triumphant over the raging waters. Then did those unhappy mortals, who had laughed at Noah's prudent forecast, most bitterly bewail their folly; with deep despair did they then see themselves swallowed up by the resistless waves, and the more sensibly did they feel the stroke of their destruction, as they had received the power, and timely notice to prevent it.

The holy fathers have considered the ark of Noah as a figure of the Church of Christ, and in that view have learnedly commented not only upon the stateliness of its bulk, but also upon the assemblage of living creatures that were contained within it. The Church, like the ark, has triumphantly risen above the storms that have been raised to depress her; by the activity and vigour of her founders, she has carried salvation even to the extremities of the earth, whilst, by the vocation of the Gentiles, she assembles within her pale a collective body of believers from every tribe and nation beneath the sun. This is the refuge which all must flock to who desire to be saved: this is the sanctuary out of which no salvation can be found. For "whoever does not believe," says our blessed Lord, "will eternally perish." Singular then has been the mercy of our Redeemer, who in preference to thousands has not only taken us into the bosom of his Church, but has moreover given us the grace to know our happiness therein. Without such a grace we had, like the rest, been borne down the

torrent which has deluged the world with vice and infidelity. By a merciful stroke of his special providence, we have been cleansed from sin in the water of baptism, by his cross we have been rescued from perdition, and through his merits we hope to enter the haven of eternal repose.

END OF THE FIRST AGE.

NAMES AND AGES OF THE TEN PATRIARCHS OF THE FIRST AGE.

	BORN.	DIED.	AGED.
	ANNO MUNDI.		
1. Adam, - - - -	—	930	930
2. Seth, - - - -	130	1042	912
3. Enos, - - - -	235	1140	905
4. Cainan, - - - -	325	1235	910
5. Malaleel, - - - -	395	1290	895
6. Jared, - - - -	460	1422	962
7. Enoch, - - - -	622	987	365
8. Methusalem, - - - -	687	1656	969
9. Lamech, - - - -	874	1651	777
10. Noah, - - - -	1057	2006	950



SECOND AGE OF THE WORLD.

From the Deluge 1657, to the Vocation of Abraham 2083 ; comprehending the space of 426 years.

Noah quits the ark : the Rain-bow. Gen. viii.

THE flood had continued in its full fury for a hundred and fifty days, when God was pleased to remember Noah and his companions in the ark. He put the wind into motion, which blowing steadily from one point, began to dispel the clouds, and to drive the waters back to their source. The inundation visibly decreased, and in the seventh month left the ark upon the top of mount Ararat, in Armenia. The ark there rested for four months, when Noah being eager to know whether the waters had subsided, opened the window and sent out a crow ; the crow, an unclean bird, and the

emblem of an abandoned sinner, returned no more into the ark; but the dove which was sent out seven days after, not finding any place to rest upon, soon flew back, and was taken in again. At the end of seven days more, she was sent out a second time, and in the evening came back with a green olive branch in her beak, which Noah joyfully received, not only as a proof that the flood was abated, but likewise as a sign that God was now reconciled with the world. He opened the top of the ark, looked round and saw that the waters had retired, and left the surface of the earth quite dry. By the command of God, he then went out of the ark, he and his wife and sons, and every other living creature with them, after they had been all shut up for a whole year. He no sooner set his foot upon the dry land, but he erected an altar, and offered to God a sacrifice, in acknowledgment of his special goodness towards him. God was pleased with Noah's gratitude, and accepted his sacrifice. He blessed him and his children, telling them to re-people the earth, which he promised never to curse again on account of the sins of men. To convince them of the care he took of their future preservation, he impressed an awe and a fear of man upon the brute creation, and gave to Noah and his sons a discretionary power over all living creatures, with permission to use them, as they used the vegetables of the earth, for food and nourishment. He moreover entered into a solemn covenant with the holy Patriarch and his Posterity, and assigned the rain-bow, as a token of the peace between them. 'When you shall see my bow in the clouds,' said he, 'be then assured that I am mindful of the contract, and of the promise I have made, never to destroy



‘the world again by another flood.’ And in effect no such general calamity since that period has befallen mankind : though their heinous crimes have often cried, and still cry aloud for vengeance. God nevertheless continues faithful to his word, nor will his promise ever fail. The rain-bow is a standing sign of his mercy towards us, and as often as that sign appears, it ought to remind us of the gratitude we owe him. For his power is still the same, nor is his arm abridged, though no longer exerted with the same visible marks of terror.

It is not simply to the painted bow, which appears in a clouded sky, that we are to confine our view ; it is the Church (says St. Ambrose) on which we are to fix our attention. Brilliant as the Rain-bow in all its glory, the Church shoots her rays of brightness on every side through the clouds, that surround her. Those brilliant rays are the divine graces with which God adorns his spouse,

and makes her shine so charming to the eyes of men. Faithful in her duty, she receives them all, as the gifts of his divine goodness to her ; she bows to God, the author of her greatness ; him she adores as the sun of justice, that enlightens and sets her up, not only as a sign, but as the mediatrix, of peace between God and his people.

Cham cursed by his Father. Gen. ix.

SCARCE had the effects of God's anger ceased upon the earth, when there happened an event, which shews what little good is to be expected from man, when his heart is once corrupted, or governed only by servile fear. Of the three sons of Noah, who had been so miraculously preserved from the general wreck, there was one, who having first drawn upon himself the malediction of his father, merited also that of God : instead of being the head of a virtuous race, for which he had been preserved, he became the author of a very unfortunate posterity. Noah seeing himself in the midst of a ruined and dispeopled country, applied himself to the works of husbandry, and amongst other rural employments, planted the vine. When the time of vintage came, he gathered and pressed the grapes, drank freely of the juice, and intoxication was the consequence, before he was aware of it. He fell asleep in a posture, as it happened, not decent to be seen, and lay uncovered in the middle of his tent ; Cham, his second son, and the father of Chanaan, was the first to discover him in that situation. Filial piety, one would think, ought to have prompted him to conceal or at least compassionate, an aged father's disgrace ; but instead of that, he impudently laughed, and diverted himself at what he saw. Nor was that all : he ran open-

mouthed with it to Sem and Japhet, and invited them also to come and join in the diversion. But they, more mindful of the reverence due to a parent, threw a mantle over their shoulders, and respectfully turning their faces a different way, covered in their father, what they could not innocently look at. Noah as soon as he awoke, being informed of all that had passed, condemned the action of Cham, and pronounced the curse, which his son Chanaan was to inherit on that account. 'Chanaan,' said he, 'shall be a slave to the slaves of his brethren unto future generations; while for their piety, Sem and Japhet shall be blessed with a long and prosperous posterity.'

This story in the literal meaning of the words, conveys a most important instruction for Children to pay that honor and respect to their parents, which God commands them, and to be always careful not to laugh at nor expose, the private failings they may discover in them: but in its figurative sense, (according to St. Austin,) it inculcates to all Christians a respect for Jesus Christ, their true Father, in his state of humiliations and sufferings. The bitter cup of affliction which his Heavenly Father gave him to drink, the fruit of that ungrateful vine, which he himself had planted, the nakedness and disgrace, which accompanied him upon the cross, are all strongly marked in the circumstances of Noah's story. And though few perhaps may be impious enough to laugh openly at the cross and ignominies of Jesus Christ, yet the number of those, who by their worldly conduct throw that slight upon their suffering Redeemer, is not very small. We in effect laugh at Christ, (says the same holy Doctor,) when by our actions we contradict the principles of our Christian pro-

fession : we despise the humiliations of Christ, by indulging the pride of life : we ridicule, in fine, the sufferings and the cross of Christ, by shewing our contempt of those, who are more professedly the followers of his footsteps, and the imitators of his patience.

The Tower of Babel. Gen. xi.

THE descendants of Noah soon became very numerous : in the space of about a single century they were so surprisingly increased, that the country they were in, was too scanty for their numbers. Being obliged to extend their territories, they began to look out for new settlements in different parts of the globe. Before their separation they proposed leaving some monument behind them that might make their memory famous in after ages. With that view they undertook to build a city, and in it to erect a Tower, the top whereof might reach to Heaven. Their intention was not merely to signalize their name, but to provide themselves moreover with a place of security against any future deluge that might happen. Extravagant as the project was, they seemed nevertheless determined to effect it. They set immediately to work ; upon the conceited notions of human pride they foolishly laid the foundations of their own disgrace, and wickedly attempted to raise themselves above the reach of being stopt or awed from sin by the fear of punishment. God fixed his eye upon those busy sons of Adam, looked down upon the Tower they were labouring at, and saw how bent they were upon finishing it. At that time they all spoke the same language, and thereby encouraged one another in their impious undertaking. Full of that thought, they did not

consider, from whom they had received the gift of speech, or that it was as easy for the Almighty to take away, as it was to give. By a stroke of the divine power they in a moment lost their uniformity of accent, and were surprised to hear nothing but a confused and discordant sound of words, which no one understood. The disorderly noise and tumult that ensued upon it, forced them to desist, and the Tower they had begun, was on that account called the Tower of Babel, or Confusion.

That Tower of Confusion, (says St. Bernard,) is the figure of all such worldly projects, as presumptuous mortals were to form through every age, in opposition to the commands of God. More pleased with the appearance, than with the reality, of being truly great, men often set aside the substance of real good, and toil after the shadow of they know not what. God in this instance shewed his displeasure at the presumption of men by punishing them in that slippery part, the tongue—which was, and still continues to be the active instrument of sin. That diversity of languages which then began, and still subsists between nations, is as it were a continual voice, that makes itself be heard over the whole earth, and intimates to all, (says St. Austin,) that the shortest and the surest way to heaven is, not in building lofty edifices to their vanity, nor in forming vast projects in the mind, but in humbly submitting to the decrees of God; not in pretending to elude his justice by an obstinate resistance, but in endeavouring to deserve his mercy by a timely repentance.

END OF THE SECOND AGE.

Names and ages of the ten Patriarchs of the second age.

	born	died	aged
	A	M	
1 Sem	1558	2158	600
2 Arphaxad	1658	1996	338
3 Sale	1693	2126	433
4 Heber	1723	2187	464
5 Phaleg	1757	1996	239
6 Rehu	1787	2026	239
7 Sarug	1819	2049	230
8 Nachor	1849	1997	148
9 Thare	1878	2083	205
10 Abraham	2008	2183	175

THIRD AGE OF THE WORLD.

From the vocation of Abraham 2083, to the delivery of the Hebrew people out of Egypt 2513, comprehending the space of 430 years.

Vocation of Abraham. Gen. xii.

FROM the dispersion of mankind into different parts of the universe, is dated the origin of the different states and kingdoms, that were there formed by their enterprising leaders. Being no longer awed by the presence of their Patriarchs, they soon forgot the principles and laid aside the practice, of the religion they had been instructed in. Instead of God, men began to worship creatures, in which they fancied a divinity to reside. A corruption of morals became almost universal, and the true religion remained but with a few of the descendants of Sem, and they were chiefly of the branch of Heber. Idolatry had begun to

spread itself even amongst them, when God was pleased to select to himself a man more deserving than the rest, whom he destined to be the founder of a more faithful race. This extraordinary man was called Abraham, the tenth in a lineal descent from Noah, and lived with his father Thare, in Ur, a city of the Chaldeans. Here it was that God appeared and imparted his orders to him. 'Go forth from thy native country, says the Almighty ; quit thy kindred and thy father's house, and pass into the land that I will shew thee. Thee I will make the father and the head of a great people, and thy name shall be famous amongst them. Those that shall bless thee, I will bless, and those that shall curse thee, will I likewise curse ; and in thee shall all the nations of the earth be blessed.'—Abraham gave implicit credit to the words he heard, and immediately prepared to execute the divine order. He communicated it to his wife and father, who agreed to go along with him. He therefore bade an eternal adieu to the place that gave him birth, and began his journey toward the country that God had pointed out to him. Lot, his brother's son, was one of the company. Abraham advanced as far as Haran, a city of Mesopotamia, where he seems to have made some stay. There it was he buried his father ; after which he proceeded in his journey towards the land of Chanaan. Upon his arrival thither, God renewed to him his former promise of putting him in possession of all that country. Abraham erected an altar upon the spot, and adored that sovereign power, which bids the empire of nations rise or fall, as it pleases to direct. He had not been long in the country, before a raging famine obliged him to leave it, and to re-

treat into Egypt. But whilst he retreated from one danger, he became apprehensive of perishing by another. The comeliness of Sarah's person, he thought would tempt the men of Egypt, to make away with the husband, that they might take the wife. For that reason, he desired her to say she was his sister, as in effect she might, without any injury to truth—The event quickly shewed, that Abraham was not wrong in his conjectures. For the Egyptians no sooner saw Sarah, than they were taken with her beauty, and described her to Pharaoh, their king. Pharaoh sent for her to his palace, with an intention of making her his wife; ordering at the same time that every mark of civility should be paid to Abraham her brother. Sarah was in a very critical situation, which must have ended in her shame, if God himself had not been the guardian of her purity. By the most convincing proofs of his anger, he made Pharaoh sensible of the wrong he had done, and that the woman, he had forced into his palace, was the wife of Abraham. Pharaoh upon this ordered Abraham to be brought before him, and without making him any other complaint, than that of his not having at first told him that Sarah was his wife, bade him take her, and go his ways. So totally averse to the crime of adultery was this prince although an idolater, says St. Ambrose, and so tender was he of a stranger's honor, with whom he had no other connexion, than that of his having taken refuge within his dominions.

Thus it was that God called to himself the man, whom he had chosen to be the father of all true believers, and such were the first proofs he made of the steadiness of his faith. He commanded him to quit every advantage, which he had been born

to in his native country, and go into a foreign land, where at his very first entrance he had all the hardships of a severe famine to struggle against. Being again forced to abandon the place he had been directed to, he retired into an idolatrous kingdom, where amidst a thousand frights, he ran a thousand risks, without any other comfort, than that of having been obedient to him, who was pleased to make that trial of his faith. But by experience he was in the end convinced, that he had nothing to fear under the immediate protection of a God, who knows how to turn to our advantage all those passing inconveniencies which we patiently submit to, rather than give up our allegiance to him.

Lot leaves Abraham. Gen. xiii.

ABRAHAM staid no longer in Egypt than necessity obliged him : he came back into the country, which he had left the year before, and fixed his residence near Bethel. He had not been long there, when he began to experience a misfortune, which is but too often the attendant of wealth. Both he and his nephew were possessed of great riches, which consisted chiefly in their numerous herds and flocks. Many servants were of course employed in taking care of them, and where different interests prevail, disputes and disagreements will necessarily arise. Abraham, who was naturally of a very pacific turn of mind, being apprehensive of the evil consequences that were likely to ensue from such domestic wrangles, judged it the more prudent part to propose to his nephew a timely separation, before the quarrel should spread from the servants to their masters. He went to find out Lot, and begged, that as they were brethren,

there might be no misunderstanding between them, and that every subject of complaint between their servants might be instantly removed. 'Behold,' said he, 'the country is open to your choice: take the part you like best: if you choose to go to the left, I will take the right: or if you prefer the right, I will then retire to the left.' Discreet and friendly was the proposal, as made by Abraham; but on the part of Lot there appeared neither the same friendship nor discretion. Inattentive to his uncle's goodness, and insensible of the loss that he was likely to suffer by such a separation, he eagerly caught at the offer that was made him, and so blindly threw himself (as St. Ambrose observes) into numberless perils and misfortunes. For the desire of the present advantage seems to have excluded every other consideration. Lot fixed his eyes upon the country that lay round the borders of the river Jordan. The freshness of its verdure, and the richness of its soil, watered with the most pleasing streams, gave it all the appearance of a delightful garden. The prospect was inviting: it excited his desire: it induced him to separate from the most holy-personage then living, and to settle in the midst of a people the most abandoned and infamous for their lusts: he settled in the town of Sodom.

From this story, short as it is, (says the same St. Ambrose,) we may gather two very important instructions. In the conduct of Abraham we see, how very cautious we ought to be, not to enter into any dispute that may lessen fraternal charity, and how suspected ought to be the whispers of servants, whose selfish views often raise complaints and jealousies of one another. In the example of Lot we discover, of what dangerous consequence

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it is, for young persons especially, to break off with a sincere and judicious friend : his advice is oftentimes more essential to their happiness than they imagine. A virtuous friendship is the source of blessings, which are not always attended to : one hasty step, inconsiderately taken, is frequently productive of evils that are felt for life. Though Lot was a just man, (as St. Peter testifies,) yet we cannot but tremble for him, when on the one hand we see him struggling with difficulties, which his imprudence had engaged him in, and on the other, bereft of the only man, who by his presence either might have prevented the evils he fell into, or taught him how to surmount them.

Abraham delivers Lot. Gen. xiv.

SOON after Lot had separated from Abraham, there happened an event which at once evinced the charity of the one, and the imprudence of the other. Four kings, it seems, had united their forces together, and made an incursion into the neighbourhood of Sodom, laying waste and plundering all before them. In order to make head against them, the king of Sodom solicited the assistance of four other petty princes, who readily accepted of the proposal, and in one body marched out against the common enemy ; they came to an engagement, were defeated and put to flight. The four confederate kings, being greatly elated with their victory, and having nothing more to oppose them, directed their march to Sodom, which they took and plundered. Lot shared in the common calamity ; his effects were pillaged, and he himself carried off amongst the prisoners. Fortunately for him, a messenger had escaped from the field of battle, and carried the news of his captivity to

Abraham. The virtuous Patriarch was grievously afflicted at what had happened, and concluding it to be no time for tears and inactive complaints, immediately collected all the force he could, and armed three hundred and eighteen of the most resolute of his dependants. With that little troop he went in pursuit of the victorious enemy; and as it was upon the divine power that he chiefly relied for success, God was pleased to give a blessing to his arms, and to crown his courage with victory. He came up with the enemy, attacked and defeated their army, which the united force of five princes had not been able to cope with. Having broken their lines, he pursued them in their flight, and rescued Lot, with all the other prisoners that had been carried off from Sodom.

It was on this occasion that he was met by Melchisedech, the king of Salem, and priest of the most high God, as the scripture calls him. This extraordinary man sacrificed in bread and wine, which the holy fathers unanimously exhibit as a figure of that wonderful Sacrifice, which Jesus Christ, the true priest according to the order (not of Aaron, but) of Melchisedech, was to institute and ordain to be performed in his church, as long as the world should last. He gave his blessing to Abraham, and rendered thanks to God for having given him victory over his enemies. The king of Sodom was exceedingly rejoiced at this unexpected turn of his affairs, and with a due sense of gratitude insisted upon Abraham's taking home with him the rich booty that he had recovered from the enemy. But Abraham, being as disinterested in his views, as he had been successful in his enterprise, generously refused the offer, and in the most solemn manner declared, that of the

spoils he would not take so much as a single thread, nor put it in any man's power to say, that he had enriched Abraham.

Thus did Abraham (as St. Ambrose remarks) become more glorious by the use he made of his victory, than by the victory itself. His example is an instruction to all Christians, that the motive of exerting their courage should be always founded in charity ; that a tender compassion for the sufferings of others should make them active in their relief ; that the best recompense of a good action is the merit of having performed it ; and that the greatest glory of a Christian is to have co-operated with the designs of God for the benefit of mankind.

The flight of Agar. Gen. xvi.

ABRAHAM seemed to be at the height of his temporal felicity ; an heir to his great riches was the only thing wanting to make him completely happy.

—The great desire he had of so happy an event, could be only equalled by his humble resignation to the divine will, and that resignation made him worthy of the blessing he so earnestly wished for. In a vision God expressly told him he should have a Son, though at that time there was not the least probable appearance of it ; for Sarah was not only barren, she was moreover far advanced in years. Abraham was too well principled in faith, not to submit his judgment to the divine word ; he knew the power, and the veracity, of him who spoke, to be equally great, so could not form the least doubt of the promised blessing. But to Sarah the time seemed long ; she saw no sign of her having a son, and her husband was growing old ; she therefore begged him to take the Egyptian Agar, her handmaid, to wife, and thereby console them both for

her past sterility. However singular the proposal may seem, Abraham knew, as the holy fathers observe, that it had its sanction from Heaven, and therefore gave his consent. The event did not answer Sarah's expectation; for what she intended to be her comfort, became a new subject of uneasiness. Agar seeing herself honoured by her master, began to despise her mistress, and to set herself above her. Sarah complained of it to Abraham: and he, to convince her, that he was far from encouraging any such insolence of behaviour, advised her to exert her authority, and to insist upon the respect which is due from a servant to her mistress. Sarah wanted nothing more. She stretched her authority to the utmost; she carried her correction to a degree of harshness and severity not to be borne with. Agar would no longer submit, left the house, and fled off into the wide country. There, in the depth of her affliction, she sat herself down near a fountain, where an angel of the Lord appeared to her, and asked from whence she came, and whither she was going. She answered with great sincerity, that she was flying from the anger of her mistress. The angel commanded her to go back, to make her submission to Sarah, and to respect the just authority that her mistress had over her.

In this manner did God employ an angel to bring things back into their natural order, out of which the hurry of passion had first thrown them. He saw (as the holy fathers take notice) that the cause of Agar's flight arose not so much from Sarah's severity, as from her own perverse temper; wherefore, without casting any blame upon Sarah, the angel directed his advice solely to Agar, telling her to humble herself at her mistress's feet. and

to regain her good graces by a submissive and cheerful obedience. For God, who never breaks through the order established by his justice, always requires that the inferior class of mankind pay a due deference to those on whom they depend. No natural abilities or talents, however great, can authorize an insult against any lawful superior ; the greater the gifts are that we have received from God, the greater should be our humility and our gratitude ; for in the Divine sight no man is great, but in proportion as he is little in his own.

Abraham entertains the three Angels. Gen. xviii.

AGAR, soon after her return into Abraham's house, in the vale of Mamre, was brought to bed of a son, who was called Ismael. At the end of thirteen years, God appeared again to Abraham, renewed all his former promises and entered into a more express covenant with him. He changed his name of Abram into Abraham, and told him, that his wife, who had hitherto been called Sarai, should henceforward be called Sarah. He then enjoined him the law of Circumcision, which he commanded him and his posterity to observe, as a sign of that sacred covenant which he had just ratified between them. For he plainly told him, that Sarah should have a son, whom he would bless, and from whom a numerous race of kings and people should descend. At hearing this, Abraham fell prostrate on the ground, and laughing with joy, asked himself, if it were possible for a man a hundred years old to have a son, or for Sarah to conceive in the ninetieth year of her age ? God repeatedly assured him it should be so, and then left him. In a promise so explicit on the part of God, Abraham could no longer doubt the event, especially as he soon after received a further

confirmation of it, in the following manner.— During the heat of the day, he happened to be sitting at the door of his tent, and by chance looking round, he beheld three Angels, in the appearance of men, coming towards him. He immediately rose up, and advanced to meet them. It was an indispensable duty with him, it seems, never to let a stranger pass without offering him hospitality. He saluted his three visitors with all that courtesy and candid simplicity which bespeak a good heart, offered them his service, begged they would let him wash their feet and present them with refreshment. Upon their accepting his offer, he stepped back into his tent, and desired Sarah to prepare three hearth-cakes; then hastening to the herd, he chose out a fat and tender calf, which he ordered his servant to kill, and dress with all expedition. His orders were speedily performed, and the entertainment served up under a tree, Abraham standing the whole time, and helping his guests to whatever they wanted. When they had done, they enquired after his wife Sarah, and he answering, that she was within her tent, they assured him, that by the time they came that way again, she should have a son. Sarah was near enough to hear what they said, and laughed secretly behind the door of the tent. Upon that one of the Angels, addressing himself to Abraham, asked what Sarah meant by laughing as she did? whether she disbelieved the promise, or fancied any thing was difficult to God? Sarah began to be afraid, and denied her having laughed. The Angels told her she had, gave her a gentle reprimand for her insincerity, rose up, and departed towards Sodom. Abraham accompanied them part of the way.

The holy fathers seem particularly delighted with the virtues that shine forth in the detail of this history. On the one hand, they seem at a loss for words to express their commendation of Abraham's benevolent hospitality; and on the other, they display all their eloquence in extolling the unaffected modesty of Sarah. Very unlike to many of her sex, who under the pretext of charity, (says St. Ambrose, seek but an occasion of shining in public, she remained private in her apartment, without so much as appearing before the strangers that her husband was entertaining.— From her example, every Christian woman ought to know, (adds the same Saint,) that domestic retirement, and the constant care of her family, constitute the chief duty of a virtuous wife.

Crimes of Sodom.

THE three Angels discoursed in a most familiar manner with Abraham, as they went along. They first spoke of the great blessings which from him should flow upon all the nations of the earth, and then told him they were going to destroy the town of Sodom, in punishment of its crimes, that cried to Heaven for vengeance. Abraham began to expostulate with them, and hoped they would not involve the innocent at least with the guilty. His charitable entreaties so far prevailed, as to engage their promise not to destroy the town, provided ten just persons could be found therein; but Sodom had them not.—Abraham and the Angels took leave of one another: he returned home, and they went on towards Sodom. Two of them reached the town about evening, and found Lot sitting at the gate. Lot still retained the principles of his virtuous education: and in the midst of a corrupt people, preserved that purity of manners which

he had learnt from Abraham. He no sooner perceived the two strangers than he rose up to salute them; he invited them to his house, and pressed them to stay all night, that they might be fresh for their journey next day. The Angels at first seemed to make some difficulty of accepting his invitation, and said they would remain in the open street. Lot would admit of no excuse, compelled them to enter under his roof, and gave them a very hospitable reception. When they had supped, and were retiring to rest, a lawless crowd of townsmen, being inflamed with an unnatural lust of sin, surrounded the house, and clamorously demanded to have the two young men that were within, given up to them. Lot was grieved to the heart to find his guests thus exposed to an insult, from which he was in hopes they had been secure under the shelter of his roof. He went out to the Sodomites, and by meek entreaties tried to dissuade them from their brutal design. They answered his representations with great insolence of language, bade him remember that he was but a stranger himself, and by no means qualified to advise or direct them. They grew excessively outrageous, were near forcing their way into Lot's house, and threatened the rudest violence to his person, when the Angels put forth their hand to his assistance, and drew him within the door, which they instantly fastened against the mob, casting at the same time such a mist upon their eyes, that they could neither see nor find the way in after him.

Like unto this is the usage, and such is the violence, which has been frequently experienced by the faithful servants of God, who live in the midst of a corrupt and unbelieving world. To

the shameless Sodomites, blinded as they were, and persisting in their attempt of breaking into Lot's house, St. Gregory compares those wicked slanderers, who never cease to insult the fairest characters. Hurried away by the spirit of malevolence, they are blind to their neighbour's good qualities, and fancy to themselves defects which have no existence but in the wilderness of their own imagination. As for those whose misfortune it is to be thus traduced by the tongue of slander, God is their protector, and his holy Angels are their guardians. For by the choice they make of preferring virtue to vice, and duty to false friendship, they secure to themselves a friend in God, who is both able and willing to support them in their utmost need.

Sodom consumed by fire. Gen. xix.

THE Angels having thus delivered Lot from the violence of a licentious mob, declared to him the commission they had to destroy Sodom and its inhabitants: they desired him to inform his sons and daughters, or any other persons who were dependent on or connected with him, to leave the town immediately, for fear of being involved with the rest of the citizens, whose abominations were no longer to be tolerated. Lot gave notice to the two young men whom he had designed for his sons-in-law, and advised them to quit the sinful city: they laughed at his advice, and treated it as a mere dream. Morning being come, the Angels pressed Lot to depart with his wife and two daughters; for Lot was dilatory, and seemingly unwilling to move. They therefore took him by the hand, and led him out of the town, expressly cautioning both him and his wife and daughters, not to look back,

but to retire with all speed into the mountain. Lot was afraid of going to the mountain, and begged leave to retreat into the neighbouring town of Segor : the Angels consented to his request, upon condition that he would make haste thither, because they could not execute their orders till he should be in a place of safety. Lot was no sooner arrived at Segor, but God let fall a shower of fire and brimstone upon Sodom and Gomorrah, and two other towns, which with all their inhabitants, and the country round, were entirely consumed. Lot's wife being terrified at the noise, unfortunately forgot the caution that the Angel had given her and looked back at the town. Her curiosity was punished on the spot : she was changed into a pillar of salt, to serve as a warning to those, who from fear or fickleness of mind, shall at any time cast a wishful look at the sinful objects they have once quitted. Struck at so terrible an instance of the Divine Justice, Lot began to tremble for the fate of Segor, and concluded he should be more safe in the mountain that the Angel had at first pointed out to him ; thither he then hastened with his two daughters, and concealed himself for some time in a cave.

Thus, through the efficacy of Abraham's prayer Lot was miraculously delivered from the sulphurous flames of Sodom. The punishment of that infamous people was adapted to the nature of their crimes. The stench and fury of the flames, kindled for no other purpose than to punish, gives us a striking figure (according to St. Gregory) of those eternal fires which are reserved for impenitent sinners in the world to come : yet, dreadful as those burnings are, they frequently are no more considered than if they were but an empty dream.

Senseless as the sons-in-law of Lot, men often laugh at the threats they hear, and disregard the danger that is hanging over their heads. If that example of the divine vengeance appeared to Lot so grievous and dreadful, can sinners stand unmoved, and unconcernedly hear Jesus Christ assuring them, that the inhabitants of Sodom, abominable as they were, will, in the last day, be treated with less severity than they who shall have heard and not profited by his holy word?

Punishment of King Abimelech. Gen. xx.

SOON after the destruction of Sodom, and in the same year, Abraham quitted his former place of residence in the vale of Mamre, and removed to the town of Gerara, in the southern part of the country.—Here the beauty of his wife exposed him to the same danger, from Abimelech, that he had once experienced from Pharaoh. Abimelech was the king of Gerara, and had an inclination to make Sarah his wife, upon the presumption that she was only Abraham's sister. But God, who had undertaken to be the protector of the virtuous pair, even against the attempt of kings, admonished Abimelech in the night, that she was Abraham's wife, and threatened him with instant death if he presumed to touch her. Terrified at the unexpected threat, Abimelech began to plead the uprightness of his intention, and hoped his ignorance would recommend him to the Divine mercy. Almighty God received his excuse, and assured him, that on account of his simplicity he had preserved his hands from sin, nor permitted him to do an action which his heart abhorred. It was the dead of the night: Abimelech was struck beyond expression at the thought of his having been so near

the fatal precipice : he started suddenly out of bed, called his officers round him, and related to them the whole adventure. He sent immediately for Abraham, to whom he made his complaint for having deceived him : ‘ For what reason, said he, ‘ did you not impart to me the whole truth ? and ‘ why was I to be left in ignorance ? What injury, ‘ what provocation had you received, thus to expose me and my people to the hazard of being ‘ cursed for an adultery, which, as we abhor, we ‘ never intended to commit ?’ Abraham replied that in this he had not acted contrary to his usual custom ; that in desiring Sarah to pass for his sister, he had not offended against the truth ; that being unacquainted with their manners when he came amongst them, he did not know whether they had any fear of God, and was therefore afraid of being murdered by them, had he moreover declared her to be his wife. Abimelech seemed satisfied with his reasons, gave him back his wife, and made him rich presents, both in cattle and in money. In taking his leave of Sarah, he told her with a smile, that he had given a thousand pieces of silver to her brother, as she called him, to buy her a veil, which he advised her to wear for the future, (as a distinctive mark, says St. Ambrose, of her being a married woman.) He desired her to remember how her deceit had been discovered ; and bade her be careful how she attempted the like again upon any other man. Abraham spoke in his turn, and finished with a prayer to God, who in consequence thereof, exempted Abimelech and his family from the punishment which they had otherwise undergone on the account of Sarah.

In this manner, (as St. Ambrose observes,) did God testify his abhorrence of adultery. Being the

protector as well as the author of matrimony, he severely punishes whatever tends to violate its sanctity, or to defile its purity. And though the effects of his vengeance may not, now-a-days, be so sudden or visible, as they formerly were, yet it is not to be imagined, that his hatred of the crime can be less now than it was of old, or that his punishment of it is to be less dreaded because less visible. The licentiousness of men may make the sin more common or more glaring at one time than at another ; but the judgments of God are at all times equally just, and equally to be feared.

Ismael turned out of doors. Gen. xxi.

CONFORMABLY to the Angel's promise, Sarah brought forth a Son, whom his father circumcised on the eighth day, as God had commanded, and called him Isaac. Notwithstanding the distinguished rank Sarah held in the world, on account of her husband's wealth and eminent virtues, she suckled her own child, and in that, (says St. Ambrose,) has given an admirable example to all such mothers, who, upon some frivolous pretence or other, often seek to exempt themselves from a duty which nature herself has imposed upon them. To nourish with her milk the tender offspring of her body, should be the glory and the joy of every mother ; and they who decline it, can be considered in no better light than that of being but half-parents to their children, since at the breast is imbibed and strengthened that mutual love which should subsist for life between a mother and her children. Sarah weaned her son when he was of a proper age, and Abraham expressed great joy on the occasion. It was a day of mirth and entertainment for the whole family, and stands recorded

as an emblem of that spiritual joy which the pastors of the Church experience, when they see their tender flock advance in virtue, and grow susceptible of more solid food. Sarah was become one of the happiest of her sex: the reproach of her long sterility was wiped away, and all the blessings of a mother united in her. The smiling Isaac increased her joy as he increased in age, till Ismael's behaviour towards him began to give her great uneasiness. Ismael, who had long been flattered as an only child, and had been taught to look upon himself as the presumptive heir of Abraham's great riches, saw his hopes cut off at once by the birth of Isaac. A disappointment of that nature must consequently affect both Ismael and his mother Agar: the joy moreover, and partiality, that was shewn to Isaac, naturally provoked Ismael's jealousy, and prompted him to vent his spleen and ill-humour against his little brother. Sarah's fondness for an only son, made her too sharply sighted not to observe what passed between them, and being apprehensive of the consequences, she desired Abraham to stop the evil at once, by turning the hand-maid and her son out of doors, assuring him, that the hand-maid's son should never share in the inheritance with her son Isaac. The good Patriarch was much hurt at the proposal, for he loved his son Ismael. But being warned by Almighty God, to act in this matter as Sarah should direct, he took a loaf of bread and a bottle of water, which he laid upon Agar's shoulder, delivered to her her son, and dismissed her. Agar, in that forlorn condition, being turned out of doors, wandered about the wilderness of Bersabee for some time till her little provisions was consumed. Her distress became extreme; she had no resource left

for the preservation either of herself or son, and abandoned herself to despair. She placed her son under a tree, there to wait for death; then retiring as far as a bow can carry, not to see him die, she sat herself down upon the ground, raised a mournful cry, and wept most bitterly. In that melancholy situation, she suddenly heard a voice, that called her by her name. It was the voice of an Angel commanding her to take care of Ismael, for that he should be the father of a numerous people. The Angel pointed out to her a fountain that was near.—She was much comforted. She educated her son in the wilderness, who in process of time became an expert archer, and married a woman of Egypt.

St. Paul expressly tells us, that, in the picture of these two sons of Abraham, is clearly represented what was in after times to happen in Christ's Church, in which the children of promise were to suffer persecution from their own brethren. Whoever would inherit the blessings of Isaac, must, with him, bear the envy and the insults of Ismael; far from returning evil for evil, he ought rather to deplore the misfortune of a brother, who, for his own demerits, is for ever banished from his father's house. It is God alone, who, in his wisdom, has decreed the one to be born of her who is free, and another to be born of her who is a slave. It is a duty incumbent on us, who are free, to thank our heavenly Father for the decree he has passed in our favour; and we must be ready to submit, with Isaac, to any persecution whatever, rather than become like Ismael the persecutors of our brethren: the wrath of Ismael was but short, the inheritance of Isaac is everlasting.



Abraham's sacrifice. Gen. xxii.

ISMAEL'S banishment restored peace to Abraham's family, and left Isaac the indisputable heir of his father's fortune. Isaac had reached the thirty-seventh year of his age, according to the Jewish tradition, when God was pleased to make trial of Abraham's faith in a point the most decisive : he ordered him to take that very Isaac, his beloved son, and offer him in sacrifice upon the mountain he should shew him. Abraham had always looked upon his son as a special gift from God, and therefore did not hesitate a single moment to give him back in the manner that God required. He had been assured that his posterity should one day become as numerous as the sands upon the shore, or as the stars in heaven. Steadfast therefore in that belief, and unshaken in his hope, Abraham stifled every doubt he might otherwise have formed of the repeated promises God had made

him : he rose early in the morning, and keeping his secret to himself, went silently out with Isaac and two servants. He carried with him the wood necessary to consume the holocaust, and directed his way toward the mountain. Fixed in his resolution, he went on for two days, and on the third came in sight of the destined place of sacrifice. He told his servants to remain at the bottom of the hill, while he with his son should go up to adore their God. Inflexible to the sensations of flesh and blood, he took in his hand the fire and the sword, and gave to his son the wood that was intended for the sacred fire. Charged with his load, Isaac proceeded up the hill, a lively representation of him who was afterward to ascend the mount of Calvary loaded with a cross, on which he was to consummate the great work of our redemption. As they were going on, Isaac asked his father, where the victim was ? The question was too interesting not to awaken all the tenderness of a father's love in such circumstances. Abraham dissembled the secret feelings of his heart, and with manly firmness answered, that God would provide the victim. Being come to the appointed spot, he erected an altar, and laid the wood in order upon it ; then having bound and placed his son Isaac thereon, he took up the sword, and stretched out his hand to strike. The firm obedience of the father and the humble submission of the son, was all that God required of them. An angel at the moment was dispatched to stop the father's arm, and to assure him that God was satisfied with the readiness of his obedience. The angel called aloud on Abraham ; Abraham answered the voice, and looking round, saw a ram with his

borns entangled in the brambles, which he took and offered a holocaust for his son.

This history, which is so mysterious, and in almost every circumstance so resembling the passages of our Savior's passion, is (according to the holy fathers) an instruction for all parents to consult the will, and implore the aid of God, before they presume to dispose of their children. Nothing less than the eternal welfare of their souls, and the service of Almighty God, ought to guide their intention, and regulate their conduct in this respect. St. Chrysostom more at large deploras the misfortune of those parents, who, notwithstanding their Christian profession, sacrifice their children, not to God, as Abraham did, but to Satan, either by engaging them in their pursuits of a vain world, or by drawing them from the practice of a virtuous life. Abraham is the only one (says he) who consecrates his son to God, while thousands of others turn their children over to the devil: and the joy we feel in seeing some few take a christian care of their little ones, is presently suppressed with grief at the sight of those greater numbers, who totally neglect that duty, and by the example they give, deserve to be considered rather as parricides, than the parents of their children.

Sarah's death. Gen xxiii.

ISAAC being restored to his parents by the express order of Almighty God, who had given him to them in their old age, continued to be the comfort of his mother, as long as she survived; for she died soon after, in the hundred and twenty-seventh year of her age, and the thirty-seventh of her motherhood. Abraham felt and bemoaned her

death ; he affectionately paid her the tribute of his tears, and gave her an honourable interment. Being a stranger in the country, without so much as a foot of land that he could call his own, he addressed himself to the people of Geth for leave to purchase a little spot of ground, wherein he might bury the remains of his deceased wife. The citizens of Geth had conceived a very high opinion of Abraham's merit, whom they stiled the Prince of God ; they begged he would fix upon the spot, which seemed the most suitable for his purpose, and take it, as a mark of the respect they bore him. Abraham thanked them in the most civil terms for their offer, but from a principle of generosity refused to accept of it, unless they would permit him to pay the full value ; the only favour he requested was their interest with Ephron, a principal man of the city, to sell him his field, in which there was a double cave, that would serve as a burying-place both for him and Sarah. Ephron, who was present, immediately made him an offer, and even insisted upon his acceptance of the field he wanted. Abraham had taken his resolution to accept of nothing but what he paid for : he desired to know what the field was worth ; it was valued at 400 sickles of silver. The generous Ephron still refused to sell, and urged the point of making a present of his ground to Abraham : Abraham upon that counted out his purchase-money in presence of the people, and positively insisted upon the contract being immediately made, and signed by proper witnesses ; which being accordingly done, he took possession of the field, and there interred his wife.

It seems not a little extraordinary, that Abraham, to whom the possession of that whole coun-

try had been so repeatedly promised, never should have thought of making any other purchase, than that of a burying-place for himself and children. The holy Patriarch had his thoughts almost constantly fixed on Heaven: the prospect of an everlasting inheritance above gave him a contempt of all perishable things below, and made him look upon the earth, only as his place of banishment and death; and therefore he was not desirous to possess any more of it, than what was sufficient to serve him for a grave. So perfectly does this conduct of the Patriarch agree with what St. Paul has witnessed of him, and so disinterested was his attachment to the delightful land of Chanaan! How desirable soever that country might seem to worldly men, to Abraham it served for nothing more than as a mirror, wherein he contemplated that invisible land, in comparison of which, as the same Apostle speaketh, all the rest is but dung and ordure.

Isaac's Marriage. Gen. xxiv.

ABRAHAM was now grown old, and the happy settlement of his son Isaac became the serious object of his thoughts.—He knew how much the happiness of man depends upon the woman whom he takes for his partner in life. In the consort he proposed for Isaac, he expected more essential qualifications than could be discovered amongst the daughters of Chanaan; he sought a woman whose piety might draw down the blessings of Heaven upon his son, at the same time that she should become his wife; and such a woman he thought was not to be met with, but amongst his own kindred in Mesopotamia.—Thither therefore he sent Eliezer, his household steward, with instruc-

tions how to act. Eliezer being come near to the town of Nachor, he humbly prayed for success in his commission, and that by some visible sign he might know the maiden whom God had chosen for Isaac's future consort. The sign he prayed for was, that of all the young women, who were then coming out of the town, according to custom, to fetch water from an adjacent fountain, whosoever upon his speaking to her should offer to let him and his cattle drink, her he should look upon as the person chosen for his master. He had scarce ended his prayer, and taken his stand near the fountain, when behold Rebecca, the fair daughter of Bathuel, came in sight. Bathuel was the eighth son of Nachor, Abraham's second brother. Rebecca filled her pitcher at the fountain, and was going off with it upon her shoulder, when Eliezer asked her to let him drink. She readily consented, and moreover offered her service to help his camels to drink. The circumstances exactly answered to his wish: by this he was thoroughly persuaded that Rebecca was the maiden whom God had chosen for the wife of Isaac, and immediately presented her with a pair of bracelets and ear-rings, in token of his acknowledgment for the kind services she had done him. He asked her whose daughter she was, and whether in her father's house there was lodging for a stranger? She answered, that her father's name was Bathuel, that they had plenty of room for him to lodge in, and good store of hay and straw for his camels. Having said that, she ran back to her mother's house, shewed her the bracelets and ear-rings, and related her whole adventure. Laban her brother went out in haste to see the generous stranger, found him near the fountain and

invited him in. Eliezer readily accepted of the invitation, but refused to take any refreshment till he had declared his message, and settled the business he was upon.—Being bid to speak what it was, he informed them, that he was the servant of Abraham, whom God had taken under his special protection in the land of Chanaan, and blessed with great wealth; that having a son grown up to man's estate, he had commissioned him to look out for a suitable match for him amongst his relations; that in obedience to his master's orders, he was therefore come into Mesopotamia; that he had earnestly commended the matter to God, and by a sign, which he mentioned, had undoubtedly learnt that Rebecca was the woman designed by Providence to be Isaac's consort, and as such demanded her in marriage for him. Bathuel and Laban were convinced that the hand of God had conducted the whole affair, and forthwith consented to the proposal. Eliezer produced the rich presents he had brought of gold and silver plate; a banquet was prepared, and the day was spent in good and cheerful entertainment. Eliezer, like a trusty servant, rose betimes next morning, impatient to return, and proposed setting off immediately. Laban and his mother insisted upon his staying at least ten days longer, which he not being willing to consent to, Rebecca was called upon to decide the point, and fix the time for their departure. Her answer was, that she was ready to go as soon as it should be determined: upon which Eliezer stood to his first resolution, and immediately set off with her toward the land of Chanaan. As they drew near their journey's end, Rebecca happened to descry Isaac walking in the field, and Eliezer telling her that it was his lord,

her intended husband, she alighted from her camel, quickly took her cloak, and covered herself with great modesty. Isaac advanced to meet her, conducted her into Sarah's tent, took her for his wife, and in her love, consoled himself for the grief which he still felt for his mother's death.

In the conduct of this affair we see no art employed, and no measure pursued, but what tends to constitute a virtuous and happy marriage: no mention is made of riches or of worldly interest; innocence of life, and probity of manners is the sole object of inquiry. For this end not only the advice of discreet and saintly persons is asked, but God himself is consulted by frequent prayer.—How charming is the circumstance of Rebecca's drawing the cloak over her face, at the sight of Isaac. In that she is an example of modesty to all young woman, (says St. Ambrose,) and she teaches them, with what discretion they are to behave themselves even towards those whom they think of making their partners for life. It is not the art of finery, nor the show of dress; it is modesty alone, and simplicity of manners, that must gain the heart, and insure a lasting love.

Jacob and Esau. Gen. xxv.

ISAAC and Rebecca passed the first twenty years of their marriage without any issue: he prayed earnestly to God for a son, and as he prayed with a due disposition of heart, his prayers were heard. Rebecca became pregnant of twins, who seemed to rival each other, even before they were born; for she felt them struggling, as it were for superiority within her. Full of apprehensions, she began to repine at her having conceived, and in holy prayer consulted the Lord to know what the

alarming prodigy foreboded. God signified to her, that she had two infants in the womb, who should be the chiefs of two different people, and that the elder of the two should become subservient to the younger.—Rebecca went her full time, and was brought to bed of two sons, the first-born of whom was red and hairy, and named Esau. His brother followed close after, holding him by the heel, which gave occasion to his being called Jacob, that is, the supplanter.

Abraham shared an equal joy with Isaac at this happy increase of his family, which enlivened his hope with the prospect of a numerous and lasting progeny. He saw his two grand children as far as the fifteenth year of their age, when having nothing more to desire in life, he died in a good old age, and was gathered to his forefathers. To his latest breath he happily preserved the same fidelity to his Creator, for which he had been so remarkable through life. Steady in his faith, and fixed in the principle of paying an unlimited obedience to the commands of God, he was not to be diverted from his duty by any human consideration. He always considered himself as a stranger in the land of Chanaan ; and yet since Providence had once called him thither, he never thought of revisiting his native country of Chaldea. His own good sense twice extricated him from the difficulties into which the beauty of his wife had thrown him, and his personal courage rescued him from the dangers to which he exposed his life for the sake of preserving Lot. Having spent a hundred and seventy-five years in one continued exercise of virtue, he died full of days, and is called the Father, as he had been the model, of all true believers.

Jacob and Esau being grown up, the one was

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plain and simple in his manner, the other a husbandman, and lover of the chase. Esau one day returned from the field hungry and much fatigued ; and observing a mess of lentil pottage, which his brother had been boiling for his own repast, earnestly begged to have it. Jacob would not part with it but upon condition of Esau's selling him his birth-right. Esau was pressed with hunger ; his present want hindered him from considering the future advantages that might accrue to him from the title of primogeniture ; he foolishly gave up his privilege to Jacob, eat the mess, and careless went his ways.

The holy fathers observe, that in these two brothers are characterised two different sorts of men, whose principles and manners are as opposite to one another, as good is to evil. These are the virtuous man, and the sensual man ; the first takes reason for his guide, the latter is swayed by pleasure.—Wealth, birth, and worldly honours, may seem to place the one in a higher rank, and make him, as it were, the elder of the two ; but neither birth, nor wealth, nor worldly honours, can entitle a man, without virtue, to a place in Heaven, or make him great in the sight of God. The virtuous man, however mean he may appear in the eyes of an ambitious world, is preferred by God in the book of life, and he whom God prefers must be truly great. Esau in selling his birth-right for a mess of pottage, furnishes an ample subject of reflection to those who inconsiderately grasp at the perishable goods of the earth, and for the sake of enjoying what they deem their present happiness, give up their pretensions to the future joys of Heaven. Blinded by a similar stroke of folly, they seem to care as little as Esau did

about the title they forfeit ; and being only intent, like him, upon gratifying their passions for the present moment, they remain equally insensible of the loss, which they entail upon themselves by the bargain they make.

Isaac blesses Jacob. Gen. xxvii.

JACOB, through the folly of Esau, having acquired the right of primogeniture, was soon after, through the contrivance of his mother, fortunate enough to have that right confirmed to him by the blessing of his father. Isaac was far advanced in years, and had lost his eye-sight ; therefore thinking the time of his dissolution to be much nearer than it really was, he resolved not to defer giving his last blessing to his children. With that design he sent for Esau his favourite son, and told him to take his bow and quiver, and to kill him some game to his liking, that at his return he might receive his father's blessing. Rebecca was in the way to hear what Isaac said, and resolved to procure that blessing for her favourite Jacob. She therefore told him to go, as soon as Esau was set out, and fetch her two of the fattest kids of the whole flock. He did so ; she lost no time, she prepared and served them up in the manner she knew her husband liked. She had already dressed Jacob in Esau's best clothes, which she had in her custody, and covered his hands and neck with the kid's skin, that if from the difference of voice in the two brothers, Isaac should suspect any fraud, he might by feeling be induced to take him for Esau. Jacob therefore in that disguise carried the meat unto his blind father and asked his blessing. Isaac no sooner heard him speak, but knew it to be Jacob's voice and asked him who he was ? Jacob an-

answered that he was his eldest son Esau. Isaac was not convinced ; the voice instead of removing did but increase his doubts : he bade his son approach, took him by the hand, and felt to find whom he could not see. ' The voice indeed,' says he, ' is the voice of Jacob, but the hands are the 'hands of Esau.' Being thus satisfied, he received the meat and the wine from Jacob, and having finished his meal, desired his son to kiss him. A sweet fragrance diffused itself from the young man's clothes, which as soon as Isaac perceived, he compared him to a field, full of the sweetest odours, and with his blessing wished him an abundance of all good things ; that he might be replenished with the dew of Heaven, and with the fat of the land. He declared him to be the lord of all his brethren, and concluded with these words, ' Whoever shall curse you, let him also be accursed, ' and whoever shall bless you, let him be replenished with benedictions.'—Scarce had Isaac finished the sentence, when Jacob went out of the room, and in came Esau with the game he had killed, big with expectation of his father's blessing. Isaac in surprise asked him who he was ? and being answered it was Esau, it is incredible with what amazement he was struck, and how awfully he admired the mysterious ways of Providence. ' Thy brother, said he, has craftily obtained the ' blessing, which I had for thee ; I have blessed ' him, and he shall be blessed.'—Whereupon Esau roared out with vexation, and in the bitterest terms arraigned his brother Jacob's perfidy. Bathed in tears, he sorrowfully asked his father, if he had not one blessing at least in reserve for a hapless son, who had been twice supplanted by a brother's treachery !

Esau in this point of view exhibits to us a striking figure of those christians, (as the holy fathers remark), who being desirous of uniting the service of God, and the service of the world together, would be glad to enjoy the sweets of the earth without giving up those of Heaven. The good old Patriarch being softened into pity at the tears of his wretched son, blessed him indeed at last but with this express reserve of his being ever subject to his brother : and this it was, which provoked Esau's resentment to such a height, that he waited but his father's death to take away his brother's life.

This history, so curious and at once so mysterious through all its parts, marks out to us Jesus Christ clothed with the appearance of a sinner, as Jacob was with the likeness of his hairy brother. And it is (according to the holy fathers) a wonderful figure not only of the reprobation of the Jews, whose desires were solely fixed upon the things below, but also of the pre-ordination of the faithful, who with holy David demand of God but one sovereign good, and confine their desires to one only blessing, which is that of inhabiting the house of our Lord for ever. We must be careful (says St. Paul) not to incur the misfortune of Esau, who in the request he made for his father's blessing, having no other title to produce than what he had made over to his brother, deserved not to be heard ; nor could he by entreaty or by his tears, prevail upon the virtuous Patriarch to retract what he had once pronounced. For as he had despised God, God in his turn despised him, and disregarded his cries, as the mark of a fictitious sorrow, that sprung only from vexation, and not from any goodness of the heart.

Jacob's Ladder. Gen. xxviii.

THE violence of Esau's anger made it no longer safe for Jacob to remain with him under the same roof. Rebecca foresaw the storm, and trembled at the thought of what might be the consequence: her apprehensions for the safety of a darling son awakened all the tenderness of a mother's affection, and put her upon the study of some contrivance to preserve him. She wisely judged that Esau's resentment might cool by length of time, if the object of it were but removed out of sight. She proposed her thoughts upon the matter to her husband, and she did it in such a manner, that it was impossible for him not to approve. She said it was time for Jacob to settle himself in life; that she could not bear the thought of his marrying a woman of Chanaan, as Esau had done; she therefore entreated him to let Jacob go to her father Bathuel in Mesopotamia, where he was likely to find a proper match for himself amongst the daughters of her brother Laban. Isaac gave his consent, and in taking leave of his son, repeated to him the blessings he had already given him. Jacob therefore quitted his native home more like a distressed man, than was flying from the persecution of an enraged brother, than in the style of a rich heir, who was going to make choice of a companion for life. In his dress and equipage he wore the badge of a Christian and truly religious humility.—Being come to a certain place in the open country after sun-set, he threw himself upon the ground, laid a stone under his head, and composed himself to sleep. During his repose he was favoured with a vision, which convinced him that the poor and persecuted are under the imme-

diate protection of Heaven.—In his sleep he saw a ladder, the foot of which stood upon the ground, and the top seemed to reach to Heaven : numbers of Angels were ascending and descending by it ; God himself was leaning thereon, and said to him, ‘ I am the God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac ; to thee I will give the land in which thou sleepest ; thy children shall be as numerous as the grains of dust upon the earth, and *in thy seed all nations shall be blessed.*—He promised to be with him wherever he should go, and to bring him back to the country which he was quitting. Jacob awoke out of sleep, and being hurried with the idea of what had been represented to him, trembling cried out, ‘ How awful is this place ! the Lord is most certainly here ; it is no other than the dwelling place of God, and the gate of heaven !’

This mysterious vision, of which the holy fathers have said so much, leaves no room to doubt of the special care that God always takes of his faithful servants. In all occurrences of life he is ever present with them ; in their most pressing wants his holy angels are waiting by their side, as witnesses of their conduct, ready to present their petitions to Almighty God for their support and comfort. Animated by such a faith, and encouraged by such a hope, the faithful Christian is neither terrified by persecution, nor disheartened by affliction. The words that Jacob spoke upon his waking, are in a special manner applied to the sanctity of our churches, in which we adore the same supreme Being, whose visible presence filled the Patriarch with so much awe,—and the holy fathers wish that every Christian, as often as he enters the house of God, would carry with him the like religious respect to-

wards the same Divine Majesty, of whose invisible presence he is fully convinced by the faith he professes.

Rachel and Lia. Gen. xxix.

JACOB, being in this manner assured of the divine protection that was watching over him, rose up with fresh confidence, and continued on his journey till he came to Haran. There meeting with some shepherds of the country, he asked them, if they were acquainted with Laban, the grandson of Nachor. The shepherds answered, that they were, and pointed out Rachel, his fair daughter, who happened to be then coming to water her father's flocks at a well just by, Jacob advanced to salute her, told her, with tears in his eyes, who he was, and quickly removed the stone from the mouth of the well, that her flocks might drink. Rachel ran to tell her father that Jacob, his sister's son, was come. Laban hastened out to meet his nephew, whom he heartily embraced and brought into his house. Jacob, with a simplicity peculiar to the Patriarchs in those days, related to his uncle the motive of his coming, the cause of his brother's anger, and the necessity he was under of absenting himself from home for a time. Laban told him, he was welcome to stay in his house as long as he pleased, and asked him what reward he should give him for his service while he staid. 'You have a daughter called Rachel,' replied Jacob, 'and if you will but suffer me to become your son-in-law, I want no other recompence: I will serve you for seven years.' His proposal was accepted of; and happy did he think himself in being to receive so amiable a consort for so trifling a service. But at the end of the seven years he found himself most

grievously disappointed ; for Laban being unwilling to see his second daughter married before the first, deceived him the very night of his marriage, and in the place of Rachel, substituted Lia, her eldest sister. Jacob did not discover his mistake before morning, when he began to complain most heavily of the injustice that was done him. To silence his complaints, Laban promised to give him Rachel, and that as soon as the seven days appointed for the solemnity of his marriage with Lia were expired he should espouse her fair sister, if he pleased, upon condition that he would agree to serve him seven years longer. Jacob acquiesced, rather than not gain the charming object of his affections. During those seven years he had six sons by Lia, and not one by Rachel, for she was barren. Rachel grieved to see herself thus subject to a reproach, which all the fondness of her husband could not compensate. The numerous offspring of her happy sister moreover fixed the sting of envy in her breast, and increased the pain of her affliction, Her only resource of comfort was from God.—She sent up her fervent prayers to Heaven, nor did she cease from praying till she obtained what she asked. Almighty God blessed her with a son, to whom she gave the name of Joseph. Jacob desired Laban to let him return to his own country. He represented to him, that the fourteen years he had bargained for were elapsed, that he had demeaned himself with the strictest honesty in his service, and that it was time for him to think of settling and providing for his own family. Laban was sensible of the treasure he possessed in Jacob, and would not willingly agree to let him go. He knew what blessings he had received from God since Jacob had the management of his flocks ; he

entreated him to continue in his service, and bade him name the recompence he expected in return. They came to an agreement, and Jacob upon the condition of having a certain share in the flocks, consented to remain six years longer.

The holy fathers, in taking a view of Jacob's life, admire the wonderful conduct of Divine Providence in his regard. Almighty God had promised him the sovereignty of the whole country of Chanaan, and yet left him no less than twenty years in foreign servitude. His children were to be the chiefs of a great people, and he, their father, was compelled to pass his life in labour and painful service. By this example, say the Saints, God has been pleased to teach us that every head of a family, and every pastor of the Church, ought in duty to labour for the salvation of those whom they have under their charge, with as much solicitude as for their own; to advance the good and happiness of their flock or family, ought to be their joy and chiefest glory; with a fatherly care they ought to watch over and provide for them in their wants, that they may with truth be able to say, what Jacob said to Laban: 'Behold, I have not lost one
' of thy flock, neither has the thief nor the wolf
' diminished thy fold; whatever accident has hap-
' pened, I have laboured to make it good; thy
' numbers are increased and multiplied; for this I
' have spared no pains, and refused no labour; day
' and night have I borne the heat and cold, and of
' their sleep have mine eyes been robbed; yet for
' this, and for all the service, that I have endea-
' voured to render to men, ingratitude and evil
' treatment has hitherto been my only recompence.

Jacob's return. Gen. xxxi.

LABAN was grown extremely jealous of Jacob on account of his great increase of wealth, which he looked upon as so much taken from himself. The prudent Patriarch began to be apprehensive of the consequences that this jealousy might produce, and thought that to save his life it was as necessary to fly from Laban as it had once been to fly from Esau. He was soon after confirmed in that opinion by a special revelation from Almighty God, who commanded him to return to his native home, and promised to be his protector against the resentments of Esau. He communicated his thoughts to Rachel and Lia; they approved of his design, and agreed to accompany him in the journey. Jacob had nothing more to do than to prepare for his departure, which he did with the utmost secrecy. Laban was gone into the country to shear his sheep: Jacob took that opportunity of collecting his substance together, and privately set off without taking leave of any one. Rachel had secreted the idols of her father's gods, and carried them away with her. It was three days before Laban was informed of this unexpected flight of his son-in-law. He then hastily assembled his dependants, and led them out as in the pursuit of an enemy, whom he intended to reduce by open force. He followed the route that the holy Patriarch had taken, and on the seventh day came up with him in the mountain of Galaad. The preceding night Almighty God had admonished him in a vision, to beware of violence and all harsh expressions against his servant Jacob. They both pitched their tents upon the mountain, where they came to a parley 'Why

said Laban, ' why do you thus run off with my two daughters, as if they were your slaves taken from an enemy? why did you conceal your departure? why was I not made acquainted with your design? I then might have accompanied you with honour, part of the way home, and have taken leave of my children. To long after your native country, and to wish to be amongst your friends, was but natural for you, and what I cannot disapprove of; but to steal away my gods.'—Here Jacob interrupted him and after making a short apology for the secrecy of his proceedings, boldly denied the theft, promising to agree, that if any one of his whole retinue had been guilty of such an action, he should satisfy for it by his death; so little did he think that his favourite Rachel was the person. Laban took him at his word, and entering into Jacob's own tent in the first place, he there made a diligent search after his gods. But not finding them, he proceeded in the same manner to the tents of Lia, and the two maid servants, and in the last place came to Rachel. Rachel had secreted the little gods under the camel's litter, and had sat down upon them. As soon as her father entered the tent she began making her excuses for not rising to salute him under the pretence of her not being well, nor in a condition to stand. Laban therefore being unable to prove the charge he had brought against Jacob, Jacob in his turn began with some warmth to complain of the many and heavy grievances, which he had been forced to undergo for twenty years in his service. When they had thus opened their mutual complaints, and expostulated with one another, they suddenly forgot the subject of their disagreement, entered into a solemn league, and parted good friends.

Saint Ambrose considers Jacob in the abuse of Laban, as a perfect model of that prudence and honesty which ought to direct our transactions with the world. In taking care to possess nothing but what he could easily carry with him, he remained independent of every other man; he possessed nothing which he had not honestly acquired, and which he could not strictly call his own.—The manner by which he had acquired his wealth, was not only equitable in itself, but even advantageous to the person whom he served. Laban had done all he could to keep him in a state of indigence and servitude, yet could not prevent his growing rich; he had always treated him with insincerity and injustice, but was forced in the end to own the superior virtues of a man, who was in all things guided and supported by the Spirit of God. Happy is the Christian, who, in the words of Jacob, can say to the devil and the world, (says the same Father,) ‘Behold, there is nothing about me, that belongs to you; search me round, and take it, if you find it.’ Happy Rachel, who, by flying from her father’s house, trampled his idols under foot! It is the example which all Christians have to follow in separating themselves from those, who, under the mistaken name of love or friendship, would persuade them to sacrifice their souls to the idols of vanity, and the world, by a violation of those sacred engagements, which they made to God at baptism.

Esau reconciled with Jacob. Gen. xxxiii.

JACOB having got free of Laban, began to consider what method he should take with his brother Esau; for he could not suppose that Esau had entirely forgot what had formerly passed between

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them." Therefore to try how he might be disposed, he sent some of his attendants before, to let him know that his brother Jacob was coming home, upon the presumption that he would be glad to see him after so long an absence. Esau at receiving this information put himself at the head of four hundred men, and set forward to meet him. Jacob was alarmed at the report, and not doubting but his brother intended to offer violence, sought for shelter under the divine protection, and by fervent prayer implored the power of the Most High against all events whatever. This done, he resolved to try such human means, as in his prudence he judged the most likely to sooth his brother's anger. He prepared him rich presents; he chose out of his herds and flocks a certain number of each sort, which he divided into two troops, and sent before him at some distance one from the other, ordering the leaders of each troop to present them successively to Esau as they met him, with the greatest tokens of submission and friendship. The night before these orders were to have been executed, Jacob had a vision, in which he seemed to be wrestling with a man till morning. It was an Angel in human shape, who not being able to throw him, touched the sinew of his thigh, which immediately became dry and contracted. The hardy Patriarch still would not yield, and refused to let his antagonist go unless he would first give him his blessing. The Angel asked him his name; he answered Jacob: 'Thou shalt no longer be called Jacob, but Israel,' replied the Angel; 'for since thou hast exerted thyself with such vigour against the Angel of God, how much more easily wilt thou prevail over the efforts of men?' It was now morning:

Jacob cast his eyes round the country, and at a distance descried his brother coming on at the head of a formidable troop. Not knowing what might happen, he ranged his wives and children in a line behind him, and advanced towards his brother. He bowed respectfully to him as he approached, and at seven different times made his obeisance to the very ground. Esau was disarmed and mollified ; unable to stand out against such marks of goodness and submission, he ran up and embraced him ; with becoming kindness he saluted his brother's wives and children, and could scarce be prevailed upon to accept his presents. He expressed the greatest satisfaction on his friendship, and begged they might finish the remaining part of the journey in each other's company. ' You see ' (said Jacob) ' that my flocks are weak, and my children young ; they travel on in very slow marches, which will be tedious to you. Let me be no burden ; if I am happy enough to have your good graces, I want no more ; return to Seir, where I will join you, as soon as circumstances will permit.'

In this manner did Jacob disarm the violence of a brother who had conspired his ruin. He considered not which of the two was most to blame ; he mentioned not any thing that could renew their former subject of disagreement ; his language was discreet and humble ; he forgot the past ; he banished from his heart every motion of passion and resentment ; or if he retained a feeling of the injuries he had received, it did not arise from any ill-will, but from a charitable and tender concern for the mischiefs that his brother had thereby drawn upon himself, (as Saint Ambrose remarks.) Great and trying were Jacob's misfortunes, and he

bore them with fortitude ; his confidence in God raised him above the reach of human fears ; amidst the terrors of an armed host, in the presence of an enraged enemy, he acted with all the coolness and deliberation of a mind at ease ; amidst the threats of an approaching death, he remained unshaken and unruffled ; by a timely condescension he triumphed over his brother's obstinacy ; by knowing when to yield, he broke his savage hatred. In this example we see that every thing at last must yield to true piety, though for a time oppressed by open force ; and that God, who with an admirable wisdom regulates the manner and the measure of suffering, with which he tries his faithful friends, turns all to their advantage and in their favour changes the hearts of men, when and as he pleases.

Dina. Gen. xxxiv.

JACOB, after his return from Mesopotamia, settled with his family near Salem, a town of the Sichemites, where he purchased a piece of land, and lived extremely happy, till an unlucky accident interrupted the peace of his family. He had a daughter called Dina, a fair virgin in the bloom of youth. Being led by a curiosity which is as natural as it is often dangerous to that age, she went out to see the women of that country. Sichem, who was the king of the place, saw her, and being taken with her beauty, seized and carried her off to his house. He tried every persuasive art to make her consent to his wicked desires, but not being able to prevail, he proceeded to the most criminal violence, and then told his father Hemor, that he would marry her with her father's consent. They both went to treat with Jacob

upon the subject. The good Patriarch, who was in great concern for what had befallen his daughter, said he could give them no answer without the approbation of his sons. The sons came in soon after, and were informed of the whole affair with all its circumstances. They were greatly exasperated at the injury done to their sister by her lover, and resolved to revenge it as soon as opportunity should offer. They however dissembled their resentment for the present, and only said, that no marriage could be lawfully contracted between their sister and the prince of Sichem, unless he and his people would first submit to the law of circumcision. Hemor and Sichem proposed it to their people, who readily came into it, and the ceremony was accordingly performed upon all the men of Sichem. The third day after, when the wound is commonly the most painful, Simeon and Levi, full brothers to Dina, without saying a word to their father, entered sword and hand into the town, and killed every man they met without exception. This first scene of blood was scarce ended, when the other sons of Jacob rushed in, pillaged the town, and carried off the spoils. Jacob was grievously provoked at his sons, especially for their having abused a religious ceremony to obtain their revenge, and loudly complained of Simeon and Levi in particular, who by an action equally cruel and perfidious, had rendered their name odious to the neighbouring cities, and exposed their little family to the danger of being cut off by the like violence. Being under this apprehension he was inspired to go to Bethel, where God had formerly appeared to him when he fled from Esau, —He marched away with his whole family unhurt and unmolested. For the terror of his name, as

the scripture remarks, had made such an impression on the people, that no one durst presume to give him the least disturbance. Soon after his arrival at Bethel, he lost his dear Rachel, who died in child-bed.—About the same time died also his father Isaac, aged a hundred and eighty years. Full of days, says the sacred text, the venerable Patriarch slept with his forefathers, and was buried by his two sons, Jacob and Esau. Esau soon after separated from his brother, for they were too rich to live together.

The history of Dina is mentioned by the holy fathers as an instance of the danger that attends an idle curiosity. It merits the particular attention of those (says St. Ambrose) whose age and sex is most exposed to danger. The loose modes and maxims of the present age ought to make a Christian virgin extremely cautious, how she trust herself unaccompanied abroad, what company she sees, and what places she frequents. Curiosity may be as strong in her as it was in Dina, and if indulged with the same liberty, may possibly be followed by the same fatal consequences.—Curiosity led her to the spot where she lost her virginity; her curiosity was the first step towards all those horrors which her brothers committed in butchering the inhabitants, and in plundering the effects of Sichem; her curiosity, in fine, was the first cause that obliged Jacob to retire from the spot, where he could no longer stay with safety to himself or family, and where they must all have perished, had not God miraculously interposed in their favour.



Joseph sold by his Brethren. Gen. xxxvii.

JACOB, who had happily escaped the attacks of foreign enemies, began to be perplexed with domestic broils, which were the more painful to him, as they were fomented by his own children. Joseph, his son by Rachel, and the last of those that were born in Mesopotamia, had accused some of his brothers of a most shameful crime, which the sacred text does not name. This accusation procured him much ill-will amongst them all; he was his father's favourite, and that alone had been enough to make them hate him. He was an innocent, artless, open-hearted youth, in the 16th year of his age, and thinking his brothers to be as well-meaning as himself, freely spoke his thoughts to them.—Amongst other things he related two of his dreams, which added fresh fuel to their glowing envy. ‘I dreamt,’ said he, ‘that I was bind-

‘ing up corn in a field with you, and that my
‘sheaf seemed to rise, as it were, and to stand up-
‘right, while yours stood round and paid homage
‘to it : and in another dream I saw the sun and
‘moon, and eleven stars, paying the like homage
‘to me.’ The relation of these two dreams kin-
dled up a flame in his brothers’ breasts, which
seemed to threaten him with present ruin, but
which the Almighty rendered instrumental to that
future greatness which his dreams presaged. Not
long after, his father sent him to visit his brothers,
who were attending their flocks in the plains of
Sichem. As soon as they saw the dreamer com-
ing as they called him, they formed a design against
his life. Ruben, the eldest of all Jacob’s children,
would not agree to the barbarous proposal. In-
stead of imbruing their hands in the blood of the
innocent, he advised them to let him down into a
dry well that was hard by. His intention was to
save his brother’s life, if he could, for the present,
and in a seasonable hour restore him to his father.
His advice took place, and Joseph was let down
into the well. Some Ismaelite merchants hap-
pening to pass by soon after in their way to Egypt,
the unnatural brothers thought it a fair opportu-
nity to get rid of Joseph without taking away his
life ; they drew him out of the well, and sold him
to the merchants for twenty pieces of silver, inten-
ding at the same time to make their father believe,
that his darling son had been devoured by wild
beasts. To make the story the more credible, they
took Joseph’s variegated coat, and having stained
it with the blood of a kid, sent it home, as if they
had found it in that condition. Jacob knew it at
first sight, and from thence concluding his son to
be really dead, rent his garments through grief,

and would admit of no consolation.—Joseph in the mean time was carried away into Egypt, where the merchants sold him to Putiphar, the prime officer of king Pharaoh's guards.

Thus was the helpless youth plunged into a state of the deepest distress, which he had neither merited nor foreseen. God had given him an obscure glimpse of the glory that was waiting for him at a distance, but concealed from him the misfortunes that were then hanging over his head. Joseph, sold by his own brothers, is a lively figure of Jesus Christ in that particular circumstance of his life, in which by the treachery of a false apostle he was likewise sold to his enemies. The grief that Jacob so justly expressed on this occasion, is (according to St. Ambrose) a singular instruction to all parents. He wept for the loss of a son, whom he tenderly loved, and whom if he had not loved so much, he would perhaps have had no cause to weep.—For the father's excessive love was the primary cause of the son's misfortune, inasmuch as it first excited his brothers' envy, and whetted their spleen against him. It is a father's duty to love his children, (says the holy doctor,) and it is but just to love them the most, who are the most deserving; but to shew that love in the presence of the rest, is always dangerous; for such a shew of preference to the one, must naturally make the others jealous, who look upon themselves as injured by it. Hence the father's partiality often becomes a real injury to his own favourite child, as far as it deprives him of the affection of his brothers. A perfect union of heart and will, is one of the most precious advantages that a father can procure in his family. No wonder if an estate, or some less valuable present made to a favourite

child, should excite the envy of the rest, (continues the same Saint,) since a coat somewhat finer than ordinary, given by Jacob to Joseph, stirred up such a ferment amongst the brothers, that even the most moderate were eager to sell him for a slave, while others insisted upon his blood.

Joseph's chastity. Gen. xxxix.

OPPRESSED innocence never is abandoned by Almighty God. Joseph in an idolatrous country in the midst of strangers, met with kinder treatment and with better friends, than he had found at home amongst his brothers. His prudence, his fidelity, and modest conduct, gained him the affection of Putiphar, his master. His genius and liberality of sentiment was not that of a common slave. His person was comely, and an engaging sweetness of countenance and behaviour made him every body's favourite. Being appointed by Putiphar to superintend his household, he acquitted himself faithfully of the trust that was reposed in him; he was happy and enjoying the sunshine of his good fortune, when a sudden storm arose from a quarter he had the least suspected. Amongst his many admirers was his mistress, Putiphar's wife. She beheld him with a fond eye. she grew amorous, and conceived a criminal affection for him; she disclosed to him her passion; she solicited his consent without being able to obtain it. Far from being checked by the first refusal, she returned again to the charge; she pressed and solicited with more eager warmth. 'How is it possible,' (replied the virtuous youth) 'that I should think of being so unfaithful to a master who has been so good, and placed such confidence in me? How is it possible that I should consent to com-

'mit such a sin in the presence of my God?' This steady resistance increased her desires. Finding him one day alone in his apartment, she attacked him with fresh eagerness; she laid hold of him, and began to offer violence. In this situation, having no witness near, Joseph had but to fly. He rushed out of doors, but left unluckily his cloak in the woman's hands. Her slighted love then turned to fury; she became outrageous; she determined to ruin the man whom she could not gain. She screamed aloud, as if Joseph had made some violent assault upon her honour; she ran out with his cloak in her hand; she held it up, and shewed it to all, as a proof of her assertion. She carried it to her husband as a trophy of her fidelity to him, and impudently produced it against the man, whose innocence was his guilt, and whose conduct had been the very reverse of her own. Putiphar gave her credit for what she said, and upon her single evidence judged the innocent to be guilty. Without any further examination, he ordered Joseph to be immediately secured, and cast into one of the state prisons. By a sentence the most unjust and cruel, Joseph was condemned to suffer for a supposed crime, of which his accuser was really guilty. For the slander was believed, and silence imposed upon the truth.

So it is, (says St. Ambrose,) speaking of the orthodox Christians, who were at that time grievously persecuted by the Arians, that the prisons are now become the dwelling of the innocent; the adulterers of our faith prevail; they accuse, and cast into chains all those who refuse to concur with them in their impious tenets. But let not the courage of those champions of Christianity be

dejected, continues the holy doctor; God will descend with them into the dungeon, as is recorded of the patriarch Joseph: nor will he abandon them in their chains, Sufferings and persecutions are the portion of God's elect; through various tribulations and painful trials lies the way to Heaven; that is the way in which our blessed Redeemer trod; that way the Apostles, and the holy Martyrs followed.—Animated by their example, and encouraged by the hope of that happy kingdom, which they have in view, the confessors of Jesus Christ receive their suffering with joy, and think themselves honoured by the contumelies they undergo in so glorious a cause. Though innocent of the crimes of which they stand accused before men, they know that in the sight of God they are still deserving of punishment, and therefore bless the hand that strikes to heal them. Void of resentment against their persecutors, they think they are under a strict obligation of loving them the more, because they so happily contribute to make them companions of the Cross, and partakers of the glory of Jesus Christ. They count the days of their affliction amongst the most happy of their lives; under their severest trials, in the midst of their sharpest sufferings, they say with holy Job, there is one in Heaven, who sees and will judge according to the uprightness of our hearts; to him we hope for the justification of our innocence, on him alone we rely for the reward of our labours.

Joseph's greatness. Gen. xl.

JOSEPH in his prison made himself beloved and esteemed by all that came near him, Honour attended him, even in the place of his disgrace.

The keeper of the prison had such an opinion of him, that he put all the other prisoners under his care, and directed himself by his advice. Two of the king's officers his cup-bearer and chief baker, had fallen into disgrace, and were lodged in the same prison with Joseph. On the same night they had each a dream, which seemed to indicate their future fortune. The cup-bearer dreamt he saw a vine, in which there were three shoots, producing first the bud, then the blossom, and at last ripe grapes; he gathered the grapes, squeezed them into Pharaoh's cup, and presented it, as usual, to the king. The baker dreamt he had three baskets of meal upon his head; and in the uppermost, different sorts of pastry-work, which the birds came to pick at. Being much troubled in mind, and anxious to know what these dreams could signify, they both applied to Joseph for an explanation. Joseph (as a figure of Jesus Christ in the judgment he passed between the two companions of his sufferings upon the cross) gave two very opposite interpretations to the two dreams, declaring to the baker, that within three days he should be hanged upon a gibbet; and to the cup-bearer, that he should be restored to his former honour.—‘When you shall stand before the king,’ (said he to the cup-bearer,) ‘speak a good word for me; for I have been traitorously sold in my own country, and am here unjustly thrown into prison.’ The event answered the prediction; Joseph nevertheless remained two years longer in confinement; for the cup-bearer, in the hurry of his prosperity, had entirely forgotten him, till he was put in mind by the relation of two dreams that Pharaoh had. Pharaoh in his sleep seemed to be standing upon the banks of the Nile, from whence

came out seven fat kine, that went and grazed in the fertile marshes. Soon after there came forth seven other kine, most hideously lean, which began to feed upon the rich banks of the river, and devoured the seven that were fat and beautiful. Pharaoh awaked, and composing himself to sleep again, saw in a second dream, seven full ears of corn upon one stalk, that were succeeded and spoiled of their beauty by seven blighted ones. These two dreams in one night seemed to portend something uncommon; and every man that pretended to any skill in Egypt, was sent for to interpret their meaning; and no one being able to say any thing that was satisfactory upon the subject, the cup-bearer mentioned what had happened to him, when in prison with a Hebrew servant called Joseph. Joseph therefore by the king's command was brought out of prison, and presented before him: the king related his dreams, which Joseph thus interpreted: 'From what has been shown to Pharaoh in his sleep, it appears, that for seven years to come there will be great plenty in the land of Egypt; and that a seven years' famine will then succeed.'—Having thus declared the meaning of the dreams, he advised the king to provide himself with large granaries, and to lay up sufficient stores against the time of scarcity. Pharaoh stood amazed at the wisdom of this young Hebrew, and received his advice as an oracle from God. Amongst all his subjects he judged none so capable and so fit as Joseph to execute a plan of that mighty consequence, and therefore created him his vicegerent over the whole kingdom of Egypt, with an absolute power to direct and command, as he should think expedient for the common weal. To insure him moreover a due respect

from the people, he gave him his own ring, put a chain of gold about his neck, invested him with a silk robe, and placed him in his second chariot, commanding the herald to proclaim aloud, that all should bend their knee to Joseph, whom in the Egyptian language he stiled the Saviour of the world.

In this manner was the illustrious Patriarch set up to public view ; thus was he drawn from the obscurity of a dungeon, and advanced to the highest pitch of worldly grandeur, So sudden and so great a change of fortune had been enough to turn the head of a man less moderate in his desires, or less steady in the principles of virtue ; in Joseph it made no alteration of sentiment, no change of principle ; the same natural goodness still held the direction of his heart and actions. As he never had been dejected at the frowns of fortune, so neither was he now elated at her smiles. Being invested with a dignity second to the king over all Egypt, he received his power as from the hand of God, for the general good of mankind. Far from revenging himself upon those who, by their slanders, had thrown him into a dungeon, he left them to the secret remorse of their own conscience, the worst of punishments that can attend an evil action in this life. In the ordinary course of visible events, a change of fortune like that of Joseph seldom occurs ; but in the invisible order of things, there daily happens a change incomparably greater—when poor suffering mortals are called from this vale of tears to the joys of Heaven. Joseph's translation from a prison to a palace, bears but a faint resemblance of the glory that God confers upon his faithful servants after death. The light and momentary sufferings

which they here endure, are there crowned with a happiness which is equally incomprehensible and eterna..

Joseph's brothers. Gen. xlii.

JOSEPH being invested with an authority, as we have seen, that extended itself over the whole Egyptian empire, soon shewed, by the use he made of his power, how much the happiness of a people depends upon the wisdom of their governors. His chief study was the good of his fellow-subjects for that he knew to be the real interest of his royal master.—Without restraining the people in the enjoyment of their property, he prudently contrived the means that were no burden, during the time of plenty, to lay up a sufficient provision of corn for their support against the famine. At the end of seven years a raging famine began to distress the land, and it was Pharaoh's order, that all in their distress should go to Joseph. With the tenderness of a father, Joseph heard their complaints, and relieved their wants. By him none were despised, none rejected; his granaries were open to all that came. The general dearth had reached as far as Chanaan, and Jacob's family, with the rest, was reduced to great distress. The good Patriarch, being told that corn was to be bought in Egypt, sent thither ten of his sons, Joseph knew them at first sight; they had not the least suspicion of his being their brother and knew no more of him, than if they had never seen him. He received them with a seeming harshness, asked them, as though they had been strangers to him, from whence they came, and whether they were not spies.—They answered, with profound respect, that distress

alone had forced them from home, and nothing but an honest intention of buying corn had brought them into Egypt; that they were twelve sons of the same father; that one of them no longer existed, and that the youngest of all, called Benjamin, was left behind with their father Jacob, in Chanaan. The name of Benjamin touched the inmost feelings of affection in Joseph's breast, and reminded him of the cruel treatment that he had once experienced from his unnatural brothers; he was apprehensive lest Benjamin also might, some day or other, experience the like ill usage, and therefore resolved to secure him out of their hands. He seemed to give no credit to their words, and said, that to assure himself of the truth of their story, he must see Benjamin; that one of them should go home and fetch him, while the rest remained his prisoners and sureties for their brother's coming. He therefore put them in prison three days, when he ordered them again to be brought out before him. They stood whispering their thoughts to one another, in their own language, little suspecting they were understood by any one there; for Joseph had spoken to them by an interpreter; they discoursed of their present affliction, and considered it as a just judgment fallen upon them for their former cruelty towards their brother Joseph. Joseph listened to and understood every word they said; his heart began to beat, his bosom heaved with fraternal affection, and the tears stole down his cheeks. He was obliged to leave the room, for fear of discovering himself too soon. When he had suppressed that flow of tenderness, and wiped away his tears, he came back, and told them, that he should content himself with detaining only Si-

meon, as an hostage, and that the rest might depart. He had given secret orders that their sacks should be filled with corn, and that the money they had given for it should be tied up in the mouth of each sack. Upon their return home they gave Jacob an account of all that had passed, and particularly of the engagement they were under of carrying Benjamin into Egypt, where Simeon was detained as a pledge of their promise. Such a tale wounded their aged father to the quick ; he bemoaned his misfortunes, he talked over his children, he was inconsolable at the thought of parting with the last and dearest of his sons. ' Joseph,' (said he) ' is no more ; Simeon is in chains, and must Benjamin be taken from me too ? No, I will not part with him ; to part with him would wring my very soul with grief and carry my grey hairs in anguish to the grave.'

The holy fathers seem charmed with the relation of this history, in which they discover such singular strokes of the Divine Providence, which sweetly disposes and brings all things to their appointed ends. The sons of Jacob were jealous of the greatness that had been foreshown to one of their brothers : they used the most efficacious means (as they thought) to prevent it, and Providence directed those very means to promote it. Joseph was forewarned from Heaven of his future greatness ; his brothers sought to put him out of the way of it, and that was the very way which led him to it ; they sold him for a slave, and the state of servitude opened him a passage to the highest honours ; they caused him to be transported into a foreign country, and there he became the preserver of his own. Such incidents of

human life may, by a profane writer, be passed over unnoticed, or be ascribed to chance; but by the inspired historian they are recorded, to serve as a conviction to the incredulous and free-thinker, that there is a God who rules and presides over all things here below; that no efforts or artifices of men can circumscribe his power, or defeat his designs. There is no wisdom, there is no prudence, and no counsel, (says the Wise Man,) powerful enough to prevail against God. By his almighty will, the every opposition that is made by men, becomes oftentimes instrumental in his hand for the accomplishment of his designs.

Joseph makes himself known to his Brothers. Gen. xlv

THE general dearth continuing still to rage with greater violence, Jacob was obliged to consent at last to let Benjamin go into Egypt, lest he should see him die with famine in the land of Chanaan. But it was not without great persuasion, that he had been prevailed upon to give his consent. Judas had in a manner extorted it from him, by pledging himself and children for Benjamin's return. By Jacob's consent they all set out again for Egypt, with considerable presents for the Governor. Joseph was no sooner told, that the brothers were arrived, than he ordered his steward to receive and entertain them. They were surprised at this civil treatment, which was so very different from what they had experienced the time before, and knew not how to account for it. They began to suspect some artful design against them on account of the money they had found tied up in their sacks of corn; and to prevent every accusation upon that score, they informed the steward that they had brought back the money which ought to

have been left with him the last time. The steward was very courteous, bade them be under no apprehension, and as a pledge of their safety introduced their brother Simeon. They began to feel themselves at ease; they washed their feet, and set their present in order before the governor came in. Joseph entered at the appointed hour, to whom they paid the most respectful homage and offered their presents. He kindly returned the salutation, and eagerly asked them, whether their aged father was still alive, and in good health. His brother Benjamin immediately drew his eye: 'This,' (said he) 'is your little brother, you mentioned to me?' His heart at that moment melted with affection; he could just speak to wish him the blessings of Heaven; the rising tears started from his eyes, and forced him to retire into an adjoining apartment, that they might flow without restraint. When the first flutter of his spirits, was abated, he washed his face and went back to his brothers in the room, where they were to dine. He sat himself down at a different table from them, for the Egyptians were not allowed to eat with Hebrews; they sat before him in order according to their age, and received the meat he sent them in great plenty. Benjamin engaged his particular attention, to whom he took care constantly to send the greatest share. The day was thus spent to the full satisfaction of the eleven brothers, and the next day appointed for their return into the land of Chanaan.—Joseph in the mean time gave orders, that their sacks should be filled with corn, and beside the money, which was tied up in each one's sack, as before, that his own silver cup should be secretly conveyed into the sack of Benjamin. They set out in the morning, but had not gone far, when

Joseph's steward overtook them with a complaint of their having stolen the governor's silver cup, in return for the civilities he had shewn them. They were surprised to hear so odious a crime laid to their charge, for which they did not conceive there could be the least foundation. Conscious of their innocence, they begged to be searched upon the spot, and if any one of them should be found to have the cup, they freely consented that he should die, and the rest be made slaves. The steward answered, that the innocent should not suffer for the guilty, and that none but he who had the cup, should become his slave. They hastily opened their sacks, and behold, Joseph's silver cup was found in the sack of Benjamin. The unsuspected discovery threw them into the utmost consternation; they knew not what to say, or what to do; they turned back into town, hastened to the governor, and flung themselves at his feet.—Having no other proof than their bare word to produce in defence of their innocence, they patiently bore his dissembled anger, and each one offered to remain his slave, if Benjamin might only be at liberty to go back to his father. 'You are free to go,' (replied Joseph,) 'but Benjamin shall remain with me. Upon which Judas, who had pledged his own children to Jacob for Benjamin's safe return, began in terms the most respectful and pathetic, to represent to Joseph the promise he had made of seeing his brother safe home again, urged the respect due to a father's grey hairs, mentioned the loss of another favourite son whom he still mourned for, and concluded by saying, that the detention of this his last and darling child would certainly sink his declining age to the grave. Joseph could refrain no longer; he bade the Egyptians leave the

room; there being alone with his brothers, he raised his voice, and said, 'I am Joseph your brother; is my father yet living? Be not afraid to approach me, I am your brother, whom you sold to be carried into Egypt. It happened by the design of an all-ruling Providence, who has thus provided for your safety. Go, hasten to my father, and let him know that his son Joseph not only lives, but has all the land of Egypt at his disposal. Go, bring him and your families hither, you shall be settled in the fertile land of Gessen; be quick make no delay.' Struck dumb with amazement, it was some time before they could make any answer. Joseph wept, and tenderly embraced them all; with greater feeling he threw himself upon the neck of Benjamin, folding him in his arms, and clasping him close to his breast.

The bare narration of Joseph's history, (say the holy fathers,) sufficiently informs us of the goodness of his heart, and of the mildness of his disposition. He is a pattern for every Christian to follow in the pardon of injuries. He said not a word of the malice of his offenders; he excused the action; he put the best construction he could upon their conduct; and so far was he from making them any reproach, that he even tried to dissipate their fears, which the consciousness of their guilt must naturally have caused within them. Invested with full power to punish offenders as he pleased, he employed it all for the good of those who had intended him the greatest evils; and their frowns of envy he repaid with the sweetest smiles of brotherly benevolence. The admirable charity of this saint is a figure of that unparalleled goodness which we adore in Jesus Christ, who being sold by his own brethren, not only pardoned

them for the cruel death they put him to, but also made the blood he spilt upon his cross, the price of their salvation, and the ransom of their souls.

Jacob goes into Egypt. Gen. xlv.

THE sons of Israel, loaded with stores and rich presents from their brother Joseph, hastened home, as fast as they could, to impart the happy tidings to their father. The joy and surprise of the good Patriarch to hear that his son Joseph was not only alive, but also had the command of all Egypt, were so great, that he seemed in a manner stupified at first, and out of his senses. When he recovered himself, and was informed at leisure of the particulars that had happened, he said, 'It is sufficient if my son Joseph be only living; I will go and embrace him before I die.' Joseph had already sent wains and beasts of burden for the convenience of transporting his father and brethren, with their goods and families, into Egypt. In an expedition of such lasting consequence to his whole family, the religious Patriarch would not proceed without first informing himself of the will, and imploring the blessing of the Most High. He slew victims to the God of his father Isaac; and God in an audible manner told him not to doubt, of going into Egypt, where, under the divine protection, he should grow into a numerous nation, and in process of time be brought back from thence, after his eyes should be there closed in death by his son Joseph. Being extremely comforted by this vision, Jacob loaded his whole substance upon Pharaoh's waggon, and with his eleven sons, their wives and little ones, to the number of seventy in all, began his journey towards the land of Egypt. Judah was sent before to apprise Joseph of his

father's coming. Joseph set off with a becoming retinue to meet him, and proceeded as far as Gessen. The moment his father's carriage came in sight, he got out of his chariot, and respectfully advanced on foot to receive him. As soon as they met, they rushed into each other's arms; they cordially embraced; they clung for some time together without being able to utter a single word. The excess of their joy was too high for either of them to speak what they felt. They wept, and their tears best witnessed the glowing sentiments of their hearts in this unexpected interview. Joseph conducted both his father and his brothers into the royal city, and presented them to the king. Pharaoh gave them a gracious reception; and according to their desire, allotted them the fertile spot of Gessen for their place of residence. There they settled unmolested, and separated from the Egyptians; there, under the protection of God, and by the particular care of Joseph, they lived strangers to the famine, which was severely felt by their neighbours round.

Truly admirable, (says Saint Chrysostom) is the conduct of Almighty God with regard to his Elect. Through various trials, by a continual succession of good, and adverse fortune, he trains them up to virtue. He tempers their success with affliction, lest they should swell too high; and then visits them again with comfort, lest they should sink beneath the weight of continued sufferings.—It was no loss either to Jacob or to Joseph to have been deprived of each other for a time; the joy they felt at meeting again, made ample amends for their past afflictions. The fortune that afterwards attended the descendants of Jacob in Egypt, was the very reverse of his. They

at first experienced every advantage they could wish for, and were in the end oppressed with all the evils that an infidel and barbarous people could inflict. For Egypt, that is to say, the world, is always to be dreaded by every true Israelite ; notwithstanding its caresses, it is not to be relied upon. It varies in its favours and in its friendship, as best suits its interest. Both its promises and its flatteries are always to be suspected by the wary Christian. It often smiles, whilst it fixes its sting ; and pampers the body, while it kills the soul.

Midwives of Egypt. Exod. i.

JACOB enjoyed a comfortable old age during the seventeen years he resided in Egypt. Upon the report of his being sick, Joseph, the bright pattern of filial piety, hastened with his two sons, Ephraim and Manasse, to pay the last duty to his dying father. The venerable Patriarch raised himself up in the bed at his son's approach, and spoke to him of the inheritance which God had promised to his seed in the land of Chanaan, whether he desired his remains might be carried after death, and deposited with his father's. Joseph promised him they should, and presented him his two sons. Manasse and Ephraim. Jacob adopted them for his own ; promised them each a share in the lands of Chanaan, and laying his hands upon their heads, blessed them both. He called his other sons around his bed, and gave to each a special blessing ; the most memorable is that which he spoke to Judah. It expresses, that from his race the Messiah, *the expectation of all nations* should be born ; and that this great event should happen at or near the time, when the sovereign

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power should be entirely taken away from the Jewish nation. Jacob died in the hundred and forty-seventh year of his age. As soon as he had breathed his last, Joseph threw himself upon the face of his deceased father, and poured out a torrent of tears. He gave orders for his physicians to embalm the body; and when the seventy days that Egypt mourned for him, were expired, he asked Pharaoh leave to see it buried, as his father had desired, in Chanaan. The king's whole court, and all the ancients of Egypt, accompanied the funeral, and Jacob was with great pomp deposited in the double cave near Mamre, by the side of Abraham and Isaac. Joseph having paid these last honours to his father with a truly filial piety, hastened back into Egypt, where he remained sole depository of the royal power and authority, as long as he lived. His brethren expressing some apprehension, lest he might take an opportunity from their father's death, to repay them for the injuries they had formerly done him, he assured them with tears in his eyes, that they had nothing to fear; that they should always find him their friend and protector; that he would feed both them and their little ones.—With the spirit of prophecy he declares, that after his death God would visit and lead them forth from thence into the land which he had promised to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, bidding them remember, when that time should come, to carry away his bones with them out of Egypt, that they might be interred with his father's in the land of Chanaan. Joseph lived to see his son's children unto the third generation, and then died, being an hundred and ten years old, during eighty of which he governed Egypt with great renown of justice and wisdom.

His body was embalmed and deposited in one of the Egyptian tombs, where it rested till the departure of the Israelites out of that country.

Within a few years after Joseph's death, a total change of affairs took place in the kingdom of Egypt. A new king, known also by the name of Pharaoh, (a name adopted, as it seems, by most of the Egyptian kings,) forgetting the glory of Joseph's administration, showed himself no friend to the Hebrew people. Far from protecting them, as his predecessors had done, he thought to afflict and destroy them. Growing jealous of their power at seeing their progeny encrease, he artfully attempted to diminish their numbers, under pretence of rendering them serviceable to the state. For that purpose he employed them in the public works, which he set on foot, and imposed such heavy burdens on them as he concluded must break their strength, and ruin their constitutions.—But as the Church was afterwards to gather strength from its worldly afflictions, so did the Israelites at that time increase the faster for being oppressed. Pharaoh took the barbarous resolution of having all their male children strangled, as soon as they were born, and charged the midwives of Egypt with its execution. The compassionate women, having the fear of God before their eyes, refused to imbrue their hands in innocent blood. Pharaoh called them to an account for not having executed his orders; they were terrified at his threats, and made use of an officious lie in their excuse, saying that the Hebrew women were not like unto those of the country, and were delivered before any midwife could come to them. The king was exasperated to find himself thus disappointed in his schemes of secret

murder, threw off the mask, and gave a general order that all the Hebrew boys, without exception, should be thrown into the river Nile.

It seems as if every tender feeling and sentiment of humanity had been banished from the breasts of the Egyptians, excepting a few women, who out of compassion to an injured people, exposed themselves to the resentment of a cruel prince. They made indeed an excuse for their disobedience by a lie, which was a weakness; yet God rewarded them for their piety towards the helpless children. Superlatively happy would it have been, (says St. Austin,) if to their feelings of humanity they had united the love of truth, and had generously chosen to expose their own lives, rather than save them by a lie. After having been resolute enough to preserve the lives of the innocent at the hazard of their own; glorious had it been for them to have gone one step farther, and meet the final stroke, rather than have fled from it by a breach of truth. Their earthly house of clay (says the holy father) might probably have been demolished by it, but in recompense thereof, they had dwelt eternally in heaven.

Moyse saved from the Nile. Exod. ii.

WHILST the Israelites were groaning under the load of oppression, and an ungrateful king was exerting his utmost malice to extinguish a people, to whom his predecessors had been indebted for their crown and prosperity, Amram, the grandson of Levi, had a son by his wife, whose name was Jochabed. Love prompted the mother to use every ingenious artifice to conceal her child, whose comely countenance made him still more dear. But as Pharaoh's order was executed with the most

unrelenting barbarity, she was compelled at the end of three months, either to give him up, or perish with him.—She therefore contrived, as it were, a cradle of bulrushes, which she twisted together, and lined the inside with pitch. In this kind of basket she laid her little infant, and exposed him on the sedgy bank of the Nile, telling her daughter to stay near the place, and cautiously wait the event. Providence so ordained, that Pharaoh's daughter, attended by her maids, should then come to that very spot with an intent to bathe in the river. She immediately espied the basket, and being curious to know what was in it, sent one of her attendants to fetch it. She opened it, and found a beautiful infant crying, and stretching out its little hands as it were for help; she was softened into pity, and resolved to save it. The sister of the infant, who was all this while upon the watch, narrowly observed, and heard what was said. She drew nearer by degrees to the princess, and at last ventured to ask her, if she wanted a nurse for the child, and offered her service to call one of the Hebrew women. Being told she might, she ran to call her mother. The mother came, and full of secret joy received her child from the princess, who promised to reward her well for her trouble in taking care of him.—When the boy was grown up, she presented him to the princess, who adopted him for her son, and called him *Moyes*, because he had been saved from the waters; for *Moyes*, in the Egyptian language, signifies water.

The holy fathers seem lost in admiration when they consider this saintly man, who was the minister of the old law, as Jesus Christ is of the new, preserved in the same wonderful manner as his Saviour was, amidst so many thousands of infants,

whom a tyrant's fury cut off in the bud of life. It is in such instances of his fatherly providence that God shews himself to be the sovereign ruler of all things, and that nothing is so easy to him as to defeat the deepest schemes that human policy can form in contradiction to his eternal designs. He seems pleased to exert a more visible power against those who presume to attack him by open force. In vain did Pharaoh strive to extirpate the Hebrew people; he nourished within his palace, as his grandson, the very man who was to deliver them out of his hands. The mother, whose fears had drove her to expose her son to the merciless waves, not only received him back again into her arms, but was even paid for nursing and taking care of him, a care more precious to her than all the treasures of Egypt. The step that was intended to rob the infant of his life, was the first advance towards his future greatness. By a Special Providence Moyses was delivered from the waters of the Nile, that at his command the son of that prince who had thrown him there, might be swallowed up in the waters of the sea. Overwhelmed in the same abyss, perished likewise those Egyptian chiefs, who had been the ministers of their master's tyranny. To all who have not given up their pretensions to reason and common sense, these instances of a superior Providence must be a convincing proof that there is a God who presides over and directs the ways of men, that the most vigorous efforts of men are but mere weakness against the Divine arm, and that to dispute the power of the Most High, is a folly not less extravagant than impious.



The burning bush. Exod. iii.

MOYSES spent the years of his youth in the royal palace of Egypt, where he was treated as Pharaoh's grandson. Having attained the fortieth year of his age, he began to think that a life so miraculously preserved by God, ought not to be idly spent amidst the pleasures of a court. Under the title of adoption he enjoyed every worldly comfort, though by birth a Hebrew, whilst his brethren were groaning under the most oppressive slavery. Being of the same race and religion with them, he saw no privilege that he could have to exempt him from sharing in the same fortune. As he was one day taking his walk, and musing upon that subject, he found an Egyptian man beating an Hebrew in a most cruel manner. Moses was too partial to his countryman to remain an idle spectator ; in the warmth of his zeal he struck the Egyptian, and killed him upon the spot. He looked

round, and seeing no one near, thought he had not been seen, buried the body, and walked off. In his round next day, he met with two Israelites that were quarrelling with one another ; he interfered, and endeavoured to reconcile them ; upon which one of them rudely asked him what he meant, and whether he intended to kill either of them, as he had killed the Egyptian the day before ? Moyses by that found he was discovered, and thought it necessary for his security to leave the country. He therefore retired across the Red Sea, into the land of Madian, which is a part of Arabia Petrosa. In Madian there lived a priest, whose name was Raguel, otherwise Jethro, who had seven daughters. These young women daily tended their father's flocks, and one day leading them to drink ; as usual, at a certain spring, they found Moyses there. By his dress and language they took him for an Egyptian, but by the service he did them in helping their flocks to drink, they found him to be a good man. They spoke advantageously of him to their father, who desired to see him. Moyses was therefore sent for, who being pleased with a certain air of goodness, that he saw in Jethro, consented to live with him. He took a liking also to Sephora, his eldest daughter, married her by mutual consent, and for forty years together took care of her father's flocks, that fed in the desert.

Moyses had one day led his flocks into the inner part of the desert, towards the mountain of Horeb, where he saw a bush on fire without its being consumed. Struck at the wonderful appearance, he advanced to examine it more closely, when a voice from amidst the flames bid him stop, and take off his shoes, for that sacred was the ground on which

he stood. God told him that the cries of the afflicted Israelites had penetrated the Heavens, that an end should be put to their labours, and that he was the man chosen to lead them out of the Egyptian slavery into the land of promise. Moyses humbly begged to be excused from an undertaking for which he deemed himself wholly unfit; but God insisted upon his obedience, and by two miracles convinced him of the Divine power that should be always at hand to support him. He first of all changed his rod into a serpent, and from a serpent into a rod. After that he bade him put his hand into his bosom, which in an instant was covered with a leprosy, and as soon made clean again. Moyses, notwithstanding, was still unwilling to consent, till being terrified by the threat of God's displeasure, he at last accepted of the charge, which he could no longer refuse without a sin. Upon that he took leave of Jethro, and hastened back into Egypt for the consolation of his countrymen.

The holy fathers look upon the burning bush, as an emblem of what happens to the elect of God. Persecuted by a jealous world, they remain unhurt and unimpaired by the flames of affliction that surround them; for God himself is in the midst of them to support them by his grace, and to render them more illustrious by their sufferings. Saint Gregory dwells upon the example of humility that Moyses gave in refusing to take upon him the charge of conducting the people of God, though so qualified with talents both of grace and nature. Little in his own eyes, he deemed himself unworthy of the honour, and unequal to the arduous task; nor was he to be prevailed upon to consent to his own preferment, but by the evidence

of miracles, and express order of God himself instructive as such an example is to all Christians, it is particularly so to those (says the same holy doctor) who are rash enough to covet the direction and command of others. For such is the presumption of human weakness, that the less virtuous and the less qualified a person is, often the more desirous is he of a charge, which the greatest Saints have always been afraid of, as above their abilities. Men, who know not how to guide themselves, wish to have the guidance of others; unable to answer for their own conduct, they thrust themselves forward to be answerable for the conduct of others.

END OF THE THIRD AGE.

Names and ages of the Patriarchs of the third age.

	born	died	aged
	A.	M.	
Abraham	2008	2183	175
Isaac	2108	2288	180
Jacob	2168	2315	147
Levi	2255	2392	137
Moyse	2433	of Amram and Jocha-	

bed, the grand children of Levi, who had lived 33 years with Isaac, and Isaac had lived 50 years with Sem. From this, and the two foregoing tables, it appears that Moyse has written nothing in his sacred history, but what was still fresh in the memory of men.

FOURTH AGE OF THE WORLD.

*From the delivery of the Israelites out of Egypt
2513, to the foundation of Solomon's Temple.
2992, comprehending the space of 4:9 years.*

Moyſes before Pharaoh. Exod. v.

PHARAOH the tyrant, who had declared so unnatural a war against the Hebrew children, was now dead, and succeeded by his son of the same name, a prince equally cruel and tyrannical in his disposition. This is the Pharaoh, before whom Moyſes and Aaron his brother presented themselves for leave to go with the people for three days into the wilderness, where God had commanded them to offer him a sacrifice. Pharaoh received them with great harshness, treated them as rebels, and said he knew nothing of the God they talked of. He ascribed their petition to a spirit of revolt, and rejected it with scorn, telling them he should give them something else to think of. He accordingly gave strict orders to his officers to impose new burdens upon the mutinous Hebrews, as he called them, and to exact their daily tasks with the utmost rigour. The people finding themselves thus loaded with new grievances, instead of being relieved by the remonstrances that had been made in their favour began to complain most bitterly; and through a strange but common weakness of mind, turned their complaints against the two brothers. They loudly murmured against Moyſes and Aaron, as if they had been the cause of those very evils which they had been labouring to remove.—It is the treatment which the zealous Pastors of the Church have often met with through

every age, in return for the pains they have taken for the service of their flocks.

The ears of God being always open to the cries of the poor and needy, he commanded Moyses to present himself a second time before Pharaoh for the deliverance of his people. Full of confidence, Moyses therefore went to the king, and on the part of God, repeated the subject of his commission. He backed his petition by a miracle, as a proof of his mission from God, and in the king's presence changed Aaron's rod into a serpent. Pharaoh had his magicians ready to mimic the divine power. By the help of their black art, they undertook to perform the like prodigy, and in effect changed their rods also into serpents. This prevented the good effect which Moyses's miracle was likely to have had upon the king's mind, and nothing more was done at that time. God soon afterwards commanded his servant Moyses to go the third time, and in his name to make a more urgent demand on Pharaoh for his consent. The place of conference was upon the banks of the Nile. Undaunted at the appearance of savage majesty, Moyses spoke with a manly firmness, but yet softened his discourse with a gentle meekness and modesty of action, that was natural to him. The king answered him with boisterous threats, and sternly refused to let the people go. Upon which Moyses quietly addressed himself to Aaron, bidding him stretch his rod over the surface of the Nile, and the waters not only of that river, but all the rivers of Egypt, were in an instant changed into blood, and the fishes died therein.

This change of the rivers into blood, is called the first plague of Egypt, and hardened was the heart of Pharaoh not to bend by such a stroke



His magicians indeed, by doing the like wonders as Moyses did misled his judgment, and gave a specious pretext of obstinacy to a prince, who only sought to find out reasons not to yield. Those reasons were insufficient to excuse him from guilt; he plainly saw the magicians were not only out-done, but likewise restrained in their power by Moyses, so as not to be able to remove the plague they had occasioned. They had changed water into blood as well as Moyses, but they could not like him, change that blood into water again. To see the laws of nature altered and brought back into their first state at the word of him, who spoke and acted in the name of the living God, was more than sufficient to have opened the eyes of a common infidel; but to a man who is wilfully blind, no evidence is clear; and on a heart that grows harder, like iron, by the strokes it receives, no impression can be easily made. By a terrible, though just judgment of God, such is the man, who in punishment of his obstinacy, is once abandoned to the malicious desires of his own heart.

Plagues of Egypt. Exod.viii.

THE first plague, by which God had sought to make Pharaoh sensible of his duty, having proved ineffectual, was followed by nine others. An incredible number of frogs, that swarmed through every place and in every house of Egypt, was the second plague, and (according to St. Austin) exhibits a striking likeness of those Christians who spend themselves in empty words, and know no piety, but in the unmeaning motion of their lips.—The sciniphs, a small flying insect, according to Philo, produced from the dust, were the third plague, and resembled those wrangling sectaries,

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who only exist and thrive by their restless spirit of altercation and dispute. The fourth plague was an infinity of flies, which terribly incommoded Pharaoh and his people, and denote those peevish sallies of a fretful temper, that tease away the peace and happiness of human society. The fifth was a grievous murrain amongst the cattle, which strongly indicates, that they who, like the irrational animal, guide themselves only by their senses, shall be struck with a spiritual pestilence, that kills the soul. The sixth inflicted boils and swelling blains upon men and beasts. The purulent and angry red, that appears in an ulcerated body, bears a visible resemblance with the inward swellings of a soul, transported with the passion either of pride or anger. The seventh plague was a storm of driving hail, accompanied with dreadful lightnings and thunders, that broke down and destroyed every thing on which it fell. Such is the boisterous fury of the wicked in pushing on their malicious designs, till they break or melt away like hail-stones, and perish amidst the ruins they have made. The eighth plague were the locusts, that devoured every green thing which the hail had spared. To these locusts all false witnesses are properly compared, as with their mouth, like them, they equally hurt and destroy. The ninth was a palpable darkness, which sat upon the land for three days throughout Egypt, excepting where the Israelites inhabited, and represents that sad obscurity which overclouds the soul of the impious, while a bright and cheerful serenity shines upon the face of the virtuous.

Such were the first temporal chastisements, by which a merciful God sought to reclaim an obdurate sinner, and to make him sensible of his duty

In this visible exertion of the divine power, we are to observe, that these plagues were not inflicted upon Pharaoh and his people all at once, but at certain intervals of time. A second scourge was not employed, till Pharaoh's hardened malice had rendered the foregoing void of its intended effect. Pharaoh's submission to the divine will on any one day would have prevented his chastisement on the next. From the very first plague the magicians saw, and in the third acknowledged, the agency of a Divine power far superior to their own. To an omnipotent God, (says the Wise Man,) it had been as easy to let loose the lions upon his enemies at first, and without any previous notice to destroy them with one blow. But incompassion to the misery of human weakness, he tempered his justice with tender mercy; he contented himself with lesser punishments in the beginning; he sought to rouse the Egyptians to a sense of their duty by degrees, and by milder strokes informed them what they had to fear, should his anger be once raised to its height. We cannot be too thoroughly convinced of the truth, that God is always to be feared, that no mortal power can pretend to resist his might, and that in asserting his own divine rights, if softer methods will not do, he will then apply the most severe. For the divine justice is not to be outdone by human malice; nor are the mercies of God to be defeated by the obstinacy of his enemies.

The Paschal Lamb. Exod.xii.

THE nine foregoing plagues having had no effect upon the heart of Pharaoh, God resolved upon a tenth, more striking and fatal than any thing that had yet happened.—Before he let fall this last

stroke of his vengeance upon the Egyptians, he commanded the Israelites to prepare and eat the Lamb, which he had told them to have in readiness ever since the tenth day of the month; prescribing at the same time the manner of the ceremony, which he would have them observe in eating it. 'Each family,' (says the sacred text,) 'shall take a lamb, and on the fourteenth day of the month shall sacrifice him in the evening, and sprinkle the doors of their houses with the blood thereof; that night they shall eat the flesh, roasted at the fire, with unleavened bread and wild lettuces. While they eat it, they shall stand with their clothes girt up, with shoes upon their feet, and staves in their hands, like travellers ready for their journey.' The obedient Israelites punctually fulfilled every circumstance of the order. On the same night God sent his exterminating Angel into every house in Egypt, that was not sprinkled with the blood of the lamb, and slew every first-born both of man and beast. Struck at the sudden death of his eldest son, Pharaoh rose in the dead of the night, and by the mournful cries that were heard around, he was convinced that the same melancholy disaster had befallen every family in Egypt, at the same hour. The consternation was universal; from the royal palace to the poorest cot, there was not a house without a dead body. Pharaoh's obduracy was at last overcome; he sent for Moyses and Aaron, and in compliance with their request, bade them go with their people, with their flocks and herds, into the desert, and there sacrifice to their God for three days. The Egyptians also pressed them to be gone, and lent them the most valuable furniture they had, on that solemn occasion. The very next morning Moyses

led forth the whole host of Israel into the desert, which lay in their way toward the land of promise; nor was there a single person left, or sick amongst them. To the number of almost six hundred thousand fighting men, besides women and children, the Israelites began to march out of Egypt, four hundred and thirty years since Abraham had first taken refuge there against the famine, and two hundred and fifteen, since, Jacob had gone thither with his whole family. It was by the special direction of Almighty God that they carried away the richest spoils of Egypt, the fine clothes, the gold and silver plate of its inhabitants, not only as a recompence for the painful services they had done them, but also as a figurative mark, that the christian church should be also furnished with temporal supplies for the external support and ornament of the divine service.

This deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, is the figure of that most singular mercy, by which the world has been since rescued from the tyranny of Satan through the blood of Jesus Christ, the immaculate Lamb of God. If that Divine victim had not been immolated on the cross for man's redemption, the unhappy sons of Adam would have been only able to weep, they could not have freed themselves from the slavery of sin. Jesus Christ by his death has set them free, and by his cross has opened to them a passage to their promised country. To nourish in our hearts a due sense of gratitude for a favour so unparalleled, and yet so unmerited on our part, we cannot too often or too seriously reflect, by whom we are at once oppressed, and by whom we have been so bountifully redeemed. The reflection will teach us to value our present happiness.

and to guard in future against the wretched state, from which we have been delivered. To be zealous in the service of Jesus Christ who can alone preserve us in the freedom he has purchased us, and carefully to shun whatever tends to throw us back into the servitude of sin, is a duty both of gratitude to God, and of charity to ourselves.

The Red Sea. Exod. xiv.

PHARAOH had consented (as we have seen) to let Moyses go with the Israelites into the wilderness for three days to perform their religious duties to Almighty God. The three days were elapsed, and no Israelites returned. Pharaoh began to suspect that they had imposed upon him, and intended to escape out of his hands. Full of those surmises, and regardless of the scourges which lay still heavy upon his kingdom, he resolved to pursue them; his subjects likewise being afraid of losing the costly clothes and plate, which they had lent to the Israelites, were eager to second his design. Pharaoh therefore assembled his troops in haste, put himself at their head, and directed his march through the desert to the Red Sea, where he found his enemies encamped upon the shore. The approach and terror of his arms, threw the defenceless Israelites into a deadly consternation. Closely pressed on one side by an enraged tyrant, who was ready to fall upon them, and hemmed in on the other by the sea, they began to abandon themselves to despair. For they forgot the wonders which God had so lately wrought in their favour, and grew diffident of the powerful Providence, which from the moment of their departure had watched over them, in the form of a

cloud by day, and of a pillar of fire by night. They crowded round Moyses, and insultingly asked him if Egypt could not as well have provided them with a grave, and what need there was of bringing them to be butchered in the wilderness? Moyses in the mildest terms endeavoured to sooth them into temper, and to rouse their drooping spirits by assuring them of the Divine protection. Pharaoh had put his troops in motion, and was advancing to attack them. Moyses retreated till he came to the very edge of the sea, when stretching forth his arm over the profound abyss, as God had commanded him, the waters were suddenly divided by a mighty wind, and opened him a passage to the opposite shore. The Israelites rushed into the dry hollow of the deep, wondering at the watery bounds that stood suspended like a wall upon their right and left, as they marched through the middle. The Angel who had hitherto gone before them at night in the form of a fiery cloud, shifted his station to the rear, and hindered the Egyptians from coming too close upon them. Pharaoh seemed insensible of the miracle; blinded by passion, he only thought of satiating his revenge, and fancying the passage to be as free and as safe for him, as for the Israelites, rushed on headlong after them with all his host. He had advanced into the middle of the abyss before he became sensible of the distinction that God makes between his friends and enemies. For from amidst the fiery cloud there appeared such glaring strokes of the Divine wrath against him and his Egyptians, that in the utmost terror and confusion they began to turn back. Moyses who with all his followers had by that time reach-

ed the other shore, stretched forth his hand upon the sea, and called back the waters to their natural state. Shut up within the bosom of the deep, the whole Egyptian army perished with their chariots and horses ; for of them all not so much as a single man escaped.

Miracles of this nature never fail in their effect of making an impression on the human mind, as they carry with them such convincing evidence of the Divine power. Prodigies that affect our outward senses, seldom pass unnoticed, (as the holy fathers remark ;) there are likewise other prodigies of a much superior, because of a more spiritual, nature ; prodigies in which we are more immediately concerned, and which nevertheless we scarce attend to.—We stand astonished (says St. Bernard) to see the Hebrew people so miraculously rescued from the slavery of Egypt, while we take no notice of a soul that, by sincere repentance and conversion, is delivered from the slavery of her passions. Pharaoh is the tyrant who was overthrown in the first instance, and the devil is vanquished in the second ; in the first were overturned the chariots and the horsemen of an earthly prince, and in the second is defeated the united force of concupiscence and sin.—The victory gained by the Israelites was over men made of flesh and blood like themselves ; the triumph of a penitent soul is over the aerial powers and the tremendous prince of darkness. To men, who judge of things as they strike their senses, the first may seem more wonderful ; but to God, by whose power all things are done, the second is more glorious

The Manna. Exod. xvi.

THE passage which had been so miraculously opened through the Red Sea, struck the most insensible of the Jews with astonishment. Penetrated with a due sense of gratitude, they joined with Moyses in singing the most sublime hymns of thanksgiving to God for his mercy toward them. The women likewise, with Mary the sister of Moyses at their head, tuned their canticles of joy to the sound of the harp, and other musical instruments. But these good dispositions of the people lasted not long. They no sooner began to feel some inconveniences for want of provisions, than their songs were changed into murmurs and complaints against Moyses, whom they made answerable for every accidental hardship they met with. Moyses, like a faithful minister of the most High, strongly reprimanded them for their behaviour, as grievously injurious to God himself. 'For the complaints you have made, (said he,) are not against us, they are against the Lord, in whose name we act. Be but convinced that the Lord himself watches over you for your preservation, and he will give you your fill.' They waited not long before the promise was accomplished. For in the evening there came into the camp a prodigious flight of quails, of which the people killed as many as they chose; and the next morning there appeared upon the ground something like the crispy substance of a hoar frost, small and white, which they called Manna, and which from that time never failed them for their support during the forty years they wandered in the wilderness. Upon shewing their surprise at the first appearance of a thing so new and unexpected. Moyses informed

the people, that this was the bread which God had sent them from Heaven for the nourishment of life; that every morning before sun-rise they were to gather as much of it as should be necessary for the present day; but that for the more religious observance of the sabbath, they should on the day before gather a double quantity. By these injunctions to his people, God has been pleased to signify to us, that we ought to prevent the sun in our acts of prayer and thanksgiving to him, and that we are not to be over solicitous about the necessities of life, nor anxious to hoard up a quantity of things that we shall never want. In consequence of these injunctions, we must observe, that the Manna corrupted if kept longer or in greater quantity than was requisite for any one day besides the Sabbath; and if not gathered early in the morning, it melted away soon after the sun was up.

The Manna is manifestly a figure of the holy Eucharist, (as Jesus Christ witnesses in his Gospel.) Miraculous was its production, and most wonderful were its effects. It had both the effect and taste of delicious food, during the time that the Israelites were upon their journey to the land of promise. It is by the Scripture called the bread of Heaven, and the bread of Angels. But as the reality is always more perfect than its figure, so still more miraculous in itself, and more wonderful in its effects is the Eucharistical food, which Jesus Christ has given to his church. This is truly the living bread, descending from Heaven, with which he nourishes, comforts and strengthens our souls during their pilgrimage on earth.—Hence the warmest sentiments of gratitude are due to our blessed Lord for so salutary an institu-

tion. A lively faith and an ardent desire of true happiness, ought to keep us so habitually disposed, that we may be worthy each day to receive and profit by it. As long as such sentiments animated the Hebrew people in the desert, they joyfully received and relished their heavenly food; but as their piety grew cold, they also grew disgusted and wished again for the flesh-pots and leeks of Egypt. A similar conduct is but too often visible in those Christians who, being cold in their devotion, and weary in the divine service, come to the holy table without being worthily disposed, and so eat to their own condemnation, not discerning the body of our Lord.

Water issues from the rock. Exod. xvii.

A POWER so miraculously and so constantly displayed by Almighty God in favour of his chosen people, ought to have removed every fear, and prevented every ground of diffidence for the future. But new trials created new fears, and rising difficulties renewed the clamours of a people naturally mutinous and inclined to rebel. The country through which they marched, was a dry and sandy desert; they came to a place called Raphidim, where no water was to be found; impatient of thirst, they grew seditious. A spirit of revolt spread itself through the camp; they vented their spleen against Moyses, whom they threatened to stone to death for having brought them out of Egypt. Of all men living, Moyses was one the most meek and gentle; the critical situation he was then in, afforded him no refuge, but in God. To God he had recourse by humble prayer; he earnestly begged the Divine power to support him in the discharge of a duty, which he never had undertaken, but in obedience to his holy will.

God was pleased with his humility, heard his prayer, and told him to take the rod, with which he had changed the waters of the Nile into blood, and to go with the ancients of Israel to the rock of Horeb, where his name should be glorified, and the people be relieved. Moyses went accordingly to the place appointed, being accompanied by the ancients, and followed by a vast crowd of the common people ; he stood with the rod in his hand, he struck the rock in their presence, and an instantaneous stream issued out. They quenched their thirst, and were satisfied. This stream is a figure of those flowing graces that are drawn from the wounds of Christ crucified ; for Christ is the rock from whence the stream of salvation flows. By these streams our hearts are softened into tears of compunction, and our souls refreshed with new vigour in their way to heaven.

On a similar occasion of discontent, (Num. c. xx.) Moyses repeated the same miracle, in a place called Cades, where Mary his sister died. The mutineers at that time carried their insolence so far, as to forget all respect for their leaders. The two brothers seeing it was not only useless, but also dangerous to contend with a lawless multitude, retired into the Tabernacle, where, bathed in tears and prostrate before God in prayer, they implored the divine mercy upon a hardened people, from whose violence they were obliged to fly. With the earnest tenderness of a father they prayed for the most ungrateful of men ; they interceded for the perservation of a people who were persecuting them for the very good they had done them. God was pleased to comfort his faithful servants by manifesting his glory to them ; and he told Moyses to lead out the people before the

rock, where he would give them water to drink. Moyses accordingly rose up, assembled his people, and bade them follow him ; he stood full before them ; he addressed himself to the rock, as though it were less hard and less deaf than they ; he struck it twice with his rod, and behold, a plentiful stream gushed out !—The people drank, and their fury was allayed with their thirst.

In this interesting miracle, the sacred writer takes notice of a circumstance which ought not to be forgotten. Moyses struck the rock twice, by which he expressed a doubt of the subsequent event. Little as the fault may seem, it was most severely punished.—Almighty God was offended by it, and therefore warned his servant out of life, before he should enter the land of promise. Moyses, who on every other occasion had been so faithful to his God, who had wrought so many and so glorious achievements in his service ; Moyses, who had so often obtained pardon for the most atrocious sins of his people, and in whose hands the plentitude of God's miraculous power seemed to be deposited, was taken out of life for a fault apparently only venial. In punishment of some little diffidence he had shown in the execution of God's order, Moyses was deprived of the only happiness that he wished to enjoy, before he died. How adorable are thy counsels, and how terrible are thy judgments, O God of Israel !

Defeat of Amalec. Exod. xvii. xviii.

ENCOURAGED by this fresh instance of the divine goodness, which had given them water from the hard rock, the Israelites kept up their spirits for a time, till they saw themselves attacked by a formidable enemy. The Amalecites were the first

who had the boldness to make war upon a nation, which God had visibly taken under his protection. They imagined, that an undisciplined multitude of men, fatigued with continual marches, spent with scarcity of provisions, and almost wholly destitute of every implement of war, would make no great resistance. Upon that cowardly presumption they drew their forces together, and marched out to destroy a people, from whom they had received no provocation, and could fear no harm ; Moyses, with his usual confidence in God, was resolved to defend himself. Neither the numbers nor the warlike shew of his enemies gave him the least alarm. He called upon Josue and ordered him to choose out some of the most valiant amongst the people, and to make head against the common enemy, assuring him at the same time, that he would be answerable for the success. The next morning Josue led out his troops to battle, while Moyses with Hur and Aaron went to the top of a neighbouring mountain, that commanded the plain, to pray for the combatants. He prayed with his arms extended in the form of a cross, which was in future times to be so salutary to us, and so formidable to our enemies. By that he taught the children of Israel, in their very first engagement, that victory depends solely upon God, and that he is ready to grant it to those who, with an humble confidence, ask it of him. The Israelites accordingly prevailed against the most vigorous efforts of Amalec, as long as Moyses lifted up his hands to heaven in prayer for them. But when through fatigue he was obliged to let them fall, his people then gave way, and the Amalecites prevailed in their turn ; which when Hur and Aaron observed, they obliged the man of God to sit down, and

standing on each side of him, held up his arms stretched out in prayer till sun-set, when the Israelites put the enemy to flight and gained a complete victory. The memory of that glorious event was, by God's order, recorded to future generations, and an eternal enmity declared against the nation of Amalec, till it should be utterly destroyed.

In this example, as we see on one hand how ineffectual every human effort is of itself to insure success, so on the other we cannot but admire the force of holy prayer, which so efficaciously engages the hand of the Almighty to assist and support us. Prayer is one of the first duties of a Christian ; it is an important, it is a public, it is an universal duty ; a duty from which no man of whatever rank or station in life can be exempt. And though it be a duty incumbent upon all in general, yet in a more special manner it regards those who are charged with the conduct of others. Unable of themselves to fulfil their obligation, they must by fervent prayer obtain the Divine help, which alone can strengthen their weakness, and make them equal to their task. To pray for those under their care is perhaps the most important service they can do them ; prayer is a source of endless blessings, which are not communicated through any other channel. If Moyses had not prayed, Josue, had not been victorious. The forces of Amalec, though more than sufficient to defeat the arms of the whole nation, could not stand against the prayers of Moyses ; the single prayer of one man contributed more to the victory than the united efforts of a great army.

The commandments given on Mount Sinai.

Exod. xix.

THREE months were elapsed since the Israelites had left the land of Egypt, and every day since that time had furnished some miraculous instance of the divine goodness towards them. God commanded Moyses to remind them of those great wonders which he had wrought in their favour, and to declare the merciful designs that he still had upon them. For of all the nations of the earth he promised to make them his chosen people, and special inheritance for ever, upon condition, that they on their part would promise to be faithful in his service, and keep his commandments. Moyses in consequence assembled the people, and related to them the words he had received from the Lord, for their consent; they all with one accord immediately cried out, that they would do whatever the Lord should command them. Upon that public profession of their willingness to obey the Divine precepts, he gave them notice to prepare for the third day, when they should hear God himself speaking to them from the summit of Mount Sinai. And that they might be worthy to appear before him, he ordered them not to approach their wives in the mean time, but to sanctify themselves, and to wash their garments. Around the foot of the holy mountain he drew a boundary, which in the name of God he charged them not to pass under pain of death.

The third day now began to dawn; a clear light diffused itself over the earth; the sky was open and serene, when behold, a dark and gloomy change came on, and a solemn scene unfolded

itself to the spectators. Dreadful thunders began to roll on every side of Mount Sinai, and quick lightnings flashed from the sullen cloud that hung over its top. The Lord descended in fire upon the steep summit, and called Moyses to him. The whole circumference of the mountain was forthwith involved in thick smoke, and an incessant stream of flames arose, as from a glowing furnace. The shrill and swelling clangours of a trumpet were also heard at the same time; the people trembled, and lay close within their tents. Moyses went down to them, and with difficulty having prevailed upon them to move out, ranged them in order beyond the boundary, that he had set round the foot of the mountain. The Lord then spoke his commands, saying, 'I am the Lord thy God: Thou shalt not have strange gods before me; nor make to thyself any graven thing: Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain: Remember thou keep holy the Sabbath day: Honour thy father and thy mother: Thou shalt not kill; Thou shalt not commit adultery: Thou shalt not steal: Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife: Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's goods.' The loud voice and presence of the Lord, arrayed with all the pomp of awful majesty, filled the Israelites with such terror, that, unable to stand any longer, they desired Moyses to speak, and not thus expose them to the danger of being terrified out of life by the tremendous language of a God.

Thus did Almighty God, for the first time, publish his Commandments in a solemn manner to the world. They are ten in number, and contain the sum of all our obligations both to God and

man ; they will to the latest posterity retain their full force, and no man can ever presume to transgress them without incurring the guilt of sin. It is the wish of the holy fathers, that every Christian shared a part at least of that holy fear with which the Israelites were at that time so deeply penetrated.—Such a fear is the beginning of true wisdom ; it checks the passions. and restrains the heart from vice. Length of time, and a corruption of morals, first amongst the Jews, and since amongst Christians, has almost worn out the salutary impression, and left the world imperfectly sensible, of its sacred obligations. Self-love has studied every art, and by every subtlety has tried to explain away the force of God's precepts and to remove every bar that is a check to our corrupt inclinations. But Jesus Christ, who has assured us that not so much as the least tittle of his law can be altered, continues to be the same God he always was, and still exacts the same respectful obedience to his precepts, No length of time can prescribe against their force, and no fashions of the age can make any change in the nature of their obligations. It is not fear, it is the nobler sentiments of love and charity, that ought to influence our obedience to the law of God. Servile fear may for a while restrain a slave from vice ; it never can perfect the free-born sons of God in Christian virtue. Very different from the stiff-necked Israelites, who desired God to speak no longer, lest their fears might kill them ; a Christian wishes to hear the voice of God himself, for he knows that the words of God are the words of life, and therefore begs him to accompany them with the unction of his Holy Spirit, that his yoke might be made sweet, and his burden light.



The Golden Calf. Exod. xxxii

IN compliance with the request of a stiff-necked people, it pleased Almighty God to speak no more in person to them, but to employ the ministry of Moyses in the future orders he had to give to them. For that purpose he called him up to the mountain, where in a private conference he imparted many fresh instructions to him. These instructions are a collection of holy laws, full of consummate wisdom, by which he regulated the religious and civil duties of his people at that time.—They are comprehended under the common title of the Jewish or Levitical Law, and are recorded at full length in the books of Moyses. Almighty God having fully explained himself to his inspired law-giver upon every particular, delivered to him two tables of stone, on both sides of which he had,

with his own finger, (as the scripture expresses it,) engraved the Ten Commandments, as the ground-work and abridgment of all his other precepts. Forty days, and as many nights, were spent in this secret interview between God and Moyses.—During that time the people had by an unaccountable hardness of heart, forgot not only Moyses, but the very God who a few weeks before had appeared so terrible to them on the mountain, under which they still lay encamped. Not knowing, as they said, what was become of Moyses, they assembled round Aaron, and in a tumultuous manner insisted upon his letting them have an Idol, like other nations, to go before them. Aaron weakly yielded to their impious demand, and ordered them to bring him a collection of gold, and golden ear-rings of their wives and daughters. He melted it down together, and formed the image of a Golden Calf. Strange as it appears, this was the idol which the Jews, amidst the applauses of a shouting multitude, set up in the camp, and adored as the God of Israel. Moyses at that very hour, by the express command of God, came down from the mountain with the two tables of the law in his hand. Struck at the unusual sound he heard, he hastened on to see what the matter was; and behold as he approached the camp, he found the people dancing and singing round the Golden Calf! Grief and indignation at the sight kindled such a flame within his breast, that he seemed in a manner to be transported out of himself; he threw down the tables from his hands, and shivered them to pieces. for they were needless to a people who had blotted the law itself out of their hearts. In the ardour of his zeal he laid hold of the idol they had made, imme-

diately broke it down, and cast it into the fire. As soon as he had reduced it to powder, he mixed it with water, and gave it to the Israelites to drink, that they might see how despicable a thing it was, which they had foolishly adopted for their God. He called Aaron to a severe account for having suffered such a scandal to be set up, and last of all addressed himself to the people in general. Having placed himself in the entrance of the camp, he proclaimed aloud, that all those who still retained any sense of their duty to God, should come forth and join him. The whole tribe of Levi ranged themselves immediately by his side.—He turned about, and told them to unsheath their swords, and to march in a straight line quite through the camp, and back again, putting every one to death that should come in their way, without any distinction or respect of persons. The faithful Levites executed the order in its full extent, and by their hands about three and twenty thousand men were sacrificed to expiate the guilt of those that survived.

To a censorious world, whose thoughts are confined to the resentment of injuries done to men only, this execution may perchance seem severe. To Christians, who consider the infinite distance that there is between the Creator and his creature, it occurs, how great a satisfaction is due to an insulted Deity. The Levites were armed with the sword of justice, and they were armed by the meek inspired minister of a God, who holds the sovereign power of life and death over all men. The whole body of the Israelites had sinned, and their sin was grievous beyond expression; a few were punished as they deserved, that the rest might repent and live. The conduct of Moyses

on this occasion is an instructive lesson (says St. Gregory) to those pliant parents who are afraid of giving the least reprimand or correction to their children ; who, though they see them straying from their duty, plunging into vice, and falling head-long towards the precipice of Hell, yet suffer no uneasiness, no disturbance, to be given them. The zealous Levites (says this holy father) had, no doubt, a true love for their children, though they spared them not. True parental love has its moments of severity ; it is forced to chastise sometimes even with rigour, that it may correct the faulty and save the delinquent, No father ever had a more tender love for his son than Moyses had for the Israelites ; their interest, their life and happiness was blended with his own. His love had duty for its foundation, and God for its motive ; it was subservient to the fidelity that he owed to his Creator ; his zeal for justice was equal to his charity. He knew how heinously his people had offended : he dreaded the anger of a just God, and was therefore zealous to prevent the consequence by a timely severity.

The second Tables of the Law. Exod. xxxiv.

MOYSES was inconsolable for the prevarication of his people. The crime of idolatry seemed to him too abominable to admit of an excuse, or to leave any room for pardon. He called, however, the tribes together on the following day, and after having set forth the enormity of their guilt in the most expressive language, he told them, that notwithstanding their ingratitude, he would present himself before God in their behalf, and endeavour to obtain their pardon for a sin which called aloud for punishment. With a heart ready to

burst with grief, he retired from their presence, prostrated himself before God, as though he had been the only guilty one, and in the sentiments of an humble penitent, begged that he might be blotted out of the book of life, rather than that his people should not obtain forgiveness. A prayer so fervent, so humble, and so charitable, did not fail of its effect. God bade him rise, and tell his people that in consideration of their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, he would put them in possession of the land he had promised them; but that henceforward he should be less liberal of his favours to a race of men; whose stubbornness of heart was likely to deserve his severest vengeance before they reached their journey's end. When Moyses repeated these last words to the people, they wept, seemed sensible of their crime, and as a mark of their repentance laid aside their usual ornaments of dress, and recovered the divine favour. Almighty God, being thus reconciled with his people, commanded Moyses to hew out two other tables of stone like those he had broken, and to go with them to the top of Mount Sinai, where he should receive the same words engraven on them, as had been engraven on the first. In obedience to this order, Moyses provided himself with two new tables, and for the second time ascended the holy mountain to converse with God. As soon as he reached the top, he prostrated himself in prayer, and begged the divine blessing upon his Israelites for the rest of their journey. The Lord descended from the cloud that hung over the summit of the mountain, heard his prayer, and promised him protection. He conversed familiarly with his servant, and gave him every instruction necessary for his own and the people's

future conduct. The holy conference lasted for forty days and forty nights, during all which time Moyses neither eat nor drank. The term being expired, he took up the two tables of stone, on which God had written the words of the Ten Commandments, and came down from the mountain, ignorant of the change that this long conversation with God had made in his countenance; for as he approached the camp, Aaron and the rest of the Israelites perceived a bright blaze of glory shining from his face, which made them afraid of coming near him. Being told the cause of their not approaching, he covered his face with a veil, which he wore ever after, except when he entered the tabernacle to converse with God. Moyses's conduct in this particular is a tacit admonition for us likewise to condescend to the weaknesses of others, as far as duty will permit, and carefully to avoid the shew of any extraordinary gifts or talents we may be possessed of.

Thus it was that God received his people again into favour, and delivered to them his Commandments, written for the second time in two tables of stone with his own hand. The singular favour he then granted to the Israelites, is a mark of that which he grants to all true penitents, when by the operation of his holy Spirit he re-imprints in their souls the character of his love, which had been effaced by sin. And it is that gratuitous grace, which no one can merit, and few obtain without great pains, and the most laborious endeavours. It is what is signified to us by the labour, which Moyses was ordered to employ in hewing out the second stones with his own hand; a labour which he had not employed about the first, (as the holy fathers observe.) The difficulty that attends the

purchase of a favour, usually makes us more sensible of its value; and this very difficulty God has annexed to the recovery of his holy grace, that it may make us more careful not to loose it a second time. For such is the weakness of our nature, that we easily resign what we can easily recover; and the greatness of a loss is not made sensible to us but by the difficulty we find in repairing it. As the restoration of the Law on stone was not to be effected but by great labour, joined with fasting and devout prayer, so neither can the loss of grace in the soul be repaired, but by tears and penitential deeds.

The Tabernacle. Ark of the Covenant, &c. Exod.
xxv. xxvi. xxviii. xxx.

MOYSES having brought the tables of the Law to the people, and the people having promised a faithful obedience to it, he turned his thoughts upon the execution of those special orders which God had given him on the mountain. Before he set to work, he convened the tribes, and informed them of the instructions he had received; he described to them the different works and ornaments which he was commanded to prepare for the divine service; he proposed to them the expence that would be requisite for so great an undertaking, and hoped that each one would be ready according to his abilities to contribute toward it. They no sooner heard the proposal made, but they produced their most precious effects, their costly stuffs, their rich plate and perfumes; the women likewise, unwilling to be out-done by the men, stripped themselves of their finest ornaments, their bracelets, their rings and ear-rings; in a word, the zeal of all the people on that occasion. striving to

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outdo one another, was so great, that Moyses was presently furnished with every material he wanted. He saw such heaps of riches lying round him, that by a public crier he gave them notice to bring no more. His next concern was to look out for proper workmen, and skilful artists for the execution. The first thing he set about was the Tabernacle, an oblong quadrangular tent, thirty cubits in length, and nine in breadth. The back part and two sides were made of Setim boards, ten cubits long, which formed the height of the edifice from the ground to the edge of the roof. These boards were placed upright, mortised at the sides, and at the bottom let into a base by two silver tenons at the corner of each board; they were fastened together on the outside with cross pieces of Setim wood, and plated with gold. The roof was covered with a double row of dried skins, laid one upon another, and fastened close together with loops and buckles of brass. This covering was made long enough to hang down a whole cubit on each side, as a fence against the weather. The inside was hung with rich embroidered tapestry, and was divided into two parts by four pillars of Setim richly gilt upon silver pediments, with capitals of gold. Before these pillars was a veil of most exquisite needle work, variegated with the brightest colours of purple, hyacinth, and scarlet. The apartment inclosed behind this veil was called the Holy of holies, and the space between that veil and the entrance was called the Sanctuary. The entrance itself was shut up by another veil of the same costly needlework, which, like the other, hung by rings against the finely ornamented pillars, that formed the front of the Tabernacle, and looked to the East.

Such was the mysterious structure of Moyses' portable Tabernacle, which (according to St. Austin) was a figure of the Church Militant in its state of pilgrimage upon Earth, as the Temple of Solomon was an emblem of its immutable state of Glory in Heaven.

The Tabernacle being finished according to the model which God himself had given upon the mountain, Moyses constructed the Ark of the Covenant, which was considered by the Israelites as the most precious symbol of their religion, the glory of Israel, according to the scripture phrase, and the strength of the Hebrew people. It was to prepare a place suitable for its reception, that the Tabernacle had been first made. The Ark was a chest of precious wood, plated with the purest gold both within and without. It measured two cubits and a half in length, one and a half in breadth, which was equal to its height. The cover or lid of it was of solid gold, and was called the Propitiatory, or Mercy Seat ; - because it was there that God heard the petitions of his people, and returned them his answers, whenever he was pleased to be propitious, and to show mercy to them. Upon the Propitiatory stood two cherubs, face to face, with their wings extended and spread, so as to cover the Ark, and formed, as it were, a throne for the God of all sanctity and majesty. Hence comes the expression, which we often meet with in the holy scripture, of God sitting upon the cherubims. At the four corners of the Ark were four golden rings, in which four levers of Setim, covered with gold, were always left for the convenience of carrying it, whenever the camp moved forward. The Ark was in a special manner consecrated to God, in which nothing was

deposited besides the two tables of the Law. It was therefore called the Ark of the Testimony, and the Ark of the Covenant, by which two names the Law itself is often called in holy writ.

Moses also gave directions for making a Table for holding Shew-bread, with a vessel smoking with the sweetest incense, and a little altar for the offering of perfumes. Both were laid over with gold, and stood in the Sanctuary. On the table were set twelve loaves of Shew-bread, so called because they were placed in open view before the Ark of the Lord, and the number of loaves was equal to the number of the tribes of Israel, that each tribe might learn from hence to express their gratitude to God by a continual sacrifice, and acknowledge their dependance on him for the blessings they enjoyed. The twelve loaves were to be replaced every week by twelve fresh loaves, and the stale bread was to be eaten by the priests within the sanctuary; nor was it lawful for any other person to eat thereof. The altar of perfume was so called, because upon it was daily offered the morning and evening sacrifice of sweet-scented gums and spices.

There was a vast variety of other sacred furniture made for the use of the Tabernacle, such as saucers, phials, and goblets of the purest gold. But of all the magnificent ornaments, and rich utensils which God commanded Moses to make for the divine service, the golden candlestick of seven branches and seven lamps of massy gold, seems to have been the chief, both for its workmanship and richness. It weighed a whole talent of the purest gold, which by computation is considerably more than three thousand pounds sterling. To inspire respect and add dignity to the sacer-

total functions, the priests had their sacred vestments also made by divine appointment.

When all things belonging to the Tabernacle were finished, it was set up, (A. M. 2514.) Round it lay a large Court, inclosed with pillars five cubits asunder, finely carved and ornamented with brass pedestals and silver capitals. Costly hangings covered the four sides of the inclosure, which was extended a hundred cubits in length, and fifty in breadth.—Within the court in the open air, and opposite the door of the Tabernacle, that opened into the Sanctuary, was placed a great Altar for the burnt-offerings, called the Altar of Holocausts.. The Tabernacle was solemnly dedicated in the beginning of the second year after the deliverance of Israel from the land of Egypt, and the Almighty God was pleased to express, by the most unquestionable signs, his approbation of the manner in which his orders had been executed. An awful Cloud hung over and covered the Tabernacle, as a token of the divine Majesty that resided within, and the cloud continued in the same position, as long as the Tabernacle rested in the same place, and only shifted, when the camp of Israel was in motion.

Thus it was that a regular plan of worship was first set on foot, and the God of Heaven and Earth began to be honored by the sacrifices which he himself ordained. He was pleased to give his people a visible object of religious veneration, proportioned to their capacity, placed within the reach of their corporal senses, some external sign being necessary to rouse our faith, to aid our weakness, to inspire respect, and to fix our attention on the exercise of divine worship.

Aaron and his sons were consecrated priests, and appointed to offer the sacrifice and to officiate in the sacred ministry, to which they were called. All the rest of the tribe of Levi were also consecrated to God, that they might assist the sacrifices in their functions. To prove the divine appointment of Aaron and his sons to the priesthood beyond the possibility of a doubt, Aaron's rod miraculously teemed with buds and blossoms, and shined with leaves and fruit, whilst the rods of the other twelve tribes remained as dry as when they were first put into the Tabernacle, before the Ark, (Numb. xvi.) So miraculous an interposition of the divine power in support of the priesthood, shews its origin, and stamps a sanctity upon its character. Core, Dathan, and Abiron, were in an instant swallowed up alive in the earth, for having presumed to take the censer into their hands, and exercise the functions of the priesthood. At the same time two hundred and fifty of their associates were destroyed by fire for having attempted in like manner to offer incense like the priests, and to usurp an authority that did not belong to them. This exemplary punishment should be a warning for all persons to be upon their guard, how they trespass or disrespect the sanctity of God's altar. One would think it ought to have awed the people into a sense of their duty ; but so hardened were they grown, that on the very next day they mutinied against Moyses and Aaron, and accused them as guilty of the death of their fellow-citizens. God was grievously offended at their perverseness, and threatened to destroy them all by fire.—Kindled by the breath of his divine anger, the fire began to rage amongst them ; Moyses hastened to the Tabernacle, and in fervent prayer strove to obtain

their pardon. Fourteen thousand seven hundred of the common people had already fallen victims to the spreading flames, when he bid Aaron fill his censer with the burning coals from the altar, and offer incense to the Lord. Aaron immediately went, and placing himself before the flames between the living and the dead, offered up his prayers with the smoking frankincense.—The flames that instant ceased, and God was pacified. We have an other dreadful instance of the justice of God, in the punishment that was inflicted on Nabad and Abiu, the two eldest sons of Aaron, who (Levit. x.) were struck dead before the altar during the time of incense, because they had filled their censers with unhallowed fire. Hereby we are taught that the most religious honours we can pay God, are not acceptable, unless accompanied with the conditions he requires. So adorable is he in his nature, that we cannot worthily honour him, but in the very manner that he has prescribed. Those who approach his altar, should see with what fire their affections are enkindled; for (as St. Gregory says) there is a fire very different from that which Jesus Christ came to kindle on earth; a fire which is raised in the hearts of many by the love of creatures, and nourished by the desire of earthly enjoyments. We ought (says this holy doctor) to banish from our hearts whatever is incompatible with the love of God.—The Philistines indeed set up the Ark and Dagon in the same temple, but Christians, who are living temples of the Holy Ghost, cannot without sacrilege admit any other object of adoration within their hearts. They cannot pretend to serve two masters, or to divide their hearts between God and the world; for God will not admit a rival of his love.

The Israelites frequently revolt in the Desert, and draw down upon themselves the severest punishments. Numb. xii. xiii. xxi. xxii. Deut. xxxiv.

NOTWITHSTANDING the stupendous miracles which God had wrought for the encouragement of the Israelites in their duty, and notwithstanding the severe instances he had given of his anger to deter them from sin, that stiff-necked people remained still as stubborn, still as perverse as ever. Neither promises nor threats, neither favours nor punishments, seemed to have any effect upon their hardened hearts. The spirit of sedition spread amongst them. They murmured, complained, and revolted above ten times against their leaders, during their journey through the desert, and it was with the utmost difficulty they were restrained within any bounds. Even Aaron and Mary his sister were not exempt from guilt, but were made sensible of their sin by a visible miracle. Aaron acknowledged his fault, and escaped punishment, but Mary was struck with a sudden leprosy, which covered her from head to foot. Moyses interceded with God for her pardon, and received for answer, that she should be separated from the people, and perform seven days' penance, in a state of excommunication from the camp.

The minds of the people were still very far from being quieted. Tired with their long and tedious journeys, they grew impatient under the hardships they had to struggle with. Upon a report of ten of the twelve spies who had been sent, one out of every tribe, to reconnoitre the land of promise, a fright seized them, and they declared they would sooner die in the desert than follow Moyses any

farther, and even began to deliberate on choosing some other leader to conduct them back into Egypt. In the mean time Josue and Caleb, two of the twelve spies, exerted their utmost endeavours to convince the people of the unreasonableness of their fears and apprehensions ; but they answered with loud clamours of indignation, and seemed determined to stone them both to death. Moyses and Aaron had no resource but in the Lord, who desired Moyses to go and inform the incredulous people that he heard their clamours and would treat them as they desired ; that they should die in the desert ; that of them all who had attained the twentieth year of their age, not one, except Josue and Caleb, should ever reach the land of Chanaan ; that for full forty years they should wander up and down the wilderness, and there die, before their children should be permitted to enter into the promised land.—The people were moved at this declaration, they wept and promised obedience. The ten seditious spies, who had been the first instigators of that popular tumult, were struck suddenly dead before the Lord, and Moyses the next day marched the people back towards the Red Sea.

Another time by their murmurs and complaints, they provoked the Lord to send among them a number of venomous serpents, whose bite caused a burning pain like that of fire. Numbers of the people having died, the survivors went like humble supplicants to Moyses, confessed their crime, and with all the show of repentance besought him to give them relief. Moved by their tears and supplications, Moyses interceded for them, and by his prayers obtained their pardon. As a token of their faith God commanded him to set up the

brazen figure of a serpent, so that the people might see it, and by looking at it be healed of the bites they received. The mortality thus ceased, and the people were mercifully freed from an evil which by their sinful murmurs they had drawn down upon themselves. We read another terrifying instance of the divine justice in the 24th chap. of Levit. where it is related, that one of the common people, who, in the transport of his anger, had blasphemed the sacred name of God, was ordered to be led out of the camp and to be stoned to death. A similar sentence was passed against a man who had gathered a few sticks upon the sabbath day. (Num. xv.) Examples of such severity seemed necessary to keep that stiff-necked people within due bounds, and to make them sensible of their duty to God. Though a transgression of his holy laws may not, now-a-days, be so visibly chastised, yet it still is no less a subject of his displeasure. With the same discerning eye he views the misconduct of sinners, and however slow he may seem to be in punishing them during life, he still is just and immutable in his decrees, and in the end will do himself justice for his long-injured mercy.

The Israelites having at length passed the wilderness, and entered into the inhabited country that lies stretched along the eastern bank of the river Jordan, were drawing towards the borders of the land of Chanaan. But being opposed in their passage by the king of the Amorrites and the king of Basan, they attacked and defeated the two kings together, and having possessed themselves of their territories, they encamped in the plains of Moab, opposite to Jericho. Balac, king of the Moabites, being alarmed thereat, sent for Balaam, a false prophet and famous soothsayer of

the country, and bribed him to come and lay his curse upon the Israelites. But Balaam terrified by an angel, who with a drawn sword had appeared to him on the way, and forbid him to utter any curse against a people whom God had blessed, declared he could pronounce nothing but blessings and happy tidings for Israel. The fear, however, of forfeiting king Balac's bounty induced him to advise a measure which he thought would defeat the blessings he had pronounced. His advice was to make the Israelites acquainted with the women of Madian, not doubting but by forming a connection with them, they would adore their idols, and so forfeit the favour and protection of the God of Abraham. This advice being followed, the idolatrous women of Madian gained the affections of the carnal Israelites, and seduced them from their duty into the most criminal engagements. Moyses wept to see the Israelites thus debauched, and used his strenuous endeavours to reclaim them. By the command of God he punished many of the offenders with death, (Num. xxv.) Phinees also, the zealous grandson of Aaron, distinguished himself on the occasion, and by one vigorous stroke rescued the children of Israel from the precipice which the avarice of a false prophet had prepared for them. At the head of twelve thousand of the most valiant of his people, he attacked the united forces of Moab, and put them to the sword, plundered their country, and burnt their cities to the ground. The women, who had been the chief agents in perverting the Israelites, were all put to death, the virgins only, who had not shared in the guilt, and who amounted to the number of thirty-two thousand, being spared. Moyses having now conducted the Israelites to the

confines of the land of promise, and as far as the river Jordan, which he knew he was not to pass, sent for Josue, and in the presence of the people invested him with the civil power of governing them in his stead, the sacerdotal and spiritual power having been already given to Eleazer the high-priest and the son of Aaron. However desirous the holy law-giver might naturally be of entering into the land of Chanaan, a land so often promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, a land so fertile and so teeming with delights, yet he knew it to be no more than the figure of a more delightful and more permanent inheritance. Having therefore taken an extensive view of it from the top of mount Nebo, he blessed God at the sight, and humbly submitted to the Divine will which did not permit him to set his foot thereon.—Knowing his end to be near at hand, he made a warm exhortation to Josue, and recapitulated all that had passed from the time the Israelites had left Egypt, and the unwearied pains he had taken to conduct them thus far. Equally admirable for his meekness as for his fortitude of mind, he united a fatherly tenderness for them with an inflexible fidelity to God. By Divine inspiration he wrote the five first books of the holy Bible, which he gave to the Levites to be carefully deposited in the Tabernacle by the side of the Ark. He died in the year of the world 2553, having completed the 120th year of his age, and the people mourned for him in the plains of Moab thirty days. It is by weaning our affections from the earth, as Moyses did; it is by dying, like him, to all worldly desires; it is, in fine, by a perfect resignation to the will of God through the various trials and afflictions of life, that we must open to

ourselves a passage into that heavenly kingdom, of which the land of promise was a figure, and which God has promised to those who love him and keep his commandments.

The Israelites pass the Jordan, and take possession of the land of Promise. Josue iii. vi. vii. x.

Upon the demise of Moyses, Josue was acknowledged his successor. He was a man of consummate wisdom, and qualified with every other virtue for the high station. Under his conduct, the Hebrew people took possession of the country, which Almighty God had promised to their forefathers. The river Jordan stopt its course to give them a dry passage, as the Red Sea had done. The walls of Jericho fell to the ground at the sound of their trumpets. The sun and moon stood still at the prayer of Josue, to give them time to accomplish a victory. God sent upon their enemies hail mingled with stones and fire. At the end of six years, scarce any enemy was left to face Josue in the field. Most of the old inhabitants of the country, who were addicted to all sorts of idolatries, impurities, and other abominable crimes, fell victims to his sword, and God permitted no more of them to remain alive, than might be sufficient to exercise the courage and punish the infidelity of his own people. The scripture mentions no less than one and thirty kings, who yielded to the victorious arms of Josue. Having made himself master of the towns, states, and territories of Chanaan by his valour, he displayed an equal wisdom in the distribution he made of them among the twelve tribes of Israel.

After the death of Josue in the hundred and tenth year of his age, Caleb put himself at the

head of the tribe of Juda, and distinguished himself by many victories that he gained against the remaining enemies of his nation. Adonibesec, the cruel tyrant of Jerusalem, who having at different times had no less than seventy kings his prisoners, cut off the extremities of their hands and feet, and forced them to lick up the leavings of his table, was the first that felt the vengeance of Caleb's arm, and in his turn experienced, by a just judgment of God, the same treatment which he had inflicted on others, (Judg. i.) The Israelites being no longer united under one head, or governed by those virtuous Sages, who had seen the wonders that God had wrought during their forty years pilgrimage through the desert, they fell into very great disorder. Each tribe began to pursue a separate interest, and made war or peace, entered into treaties and alliances, as party and passion did lead them. Soon after the death of Josue, a civil war broke out amongst them, which terminated almost in the total ruin of one of their tribes. It arose from the death of a Levite's wife, occasioned by the barbarous treatment she had suffered in the town of Gabaa. In the two first engagements, the confederate tribes of Israel lost forty thousand of their best troops; but having renewed the battle a third time, they gained a complete victory over the Benjamites, and nearly extinguished that unhappy tribe, the massacre being so universal that of the whole tribe only six hundred men escaped by flying into the desert. (Jud. xix. xx.) The generous Israelites, instead of rejoicing, were extremely grieved at a victory which had reduced a kindred people so low. They wept to think that they had been the instruments of such severity and turned their thoughts imme-

diately upon the means of repairing the losses of their surviving brethren and fellow-citizens. It would be shameful (as the holy fathers observe) for Christians, in point of Charity, to be outdone by them, to be less tender of their neighbours interest, to shew less feeling, or to be less compassionate for a brother's sufferings.

The Israelites fell into fresh sins. A run of several years prosperity made them forget their duty again. They intermarried with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, and by degrees grew familiar with their vices, imbibed their principles, worshipped their idols, and committed the same abominations. To punish them for their apostacy, God made use of those very people who had seduced them from their duty. By them they were at different times reduced to a state of servitude and tyrannically oppressed until the smart of temporal misfortunes roused them up to a sense of their duty, and made them return to God by repentance. Ever mindful of his mercies to men. God was pleased to listen to their cries, and for their relief and defence he called forth some extraordinary personages, who from the authority they had over the people, were called Judges. It was under the Judges that Ruth, a daughter of the Moabites, born of idolatrous parents, was, in reward of her piety and dutiful behaviour to Noemi, her mother-in-law, raised to the greatest honor then upon earth, the honor of being ranked in the genealogy of the Messias, and becoming one of his progenitors according to the flesh; the issue of her marriage with Booz being Obed the father of Isai, and grandfather of David, (Ruth ii. iii.) The most remarkable of the judges were Deborah, (Judg. iv.) Gedeon. (Judg. vi.



vii.) Abimele, (Judg. viii. ix.) Jepte, (Judg. xi.) Sampson, (Judge. xiv. xv. xvi.) and Samuel. Sampson was favoured by Heaven with such strength, that he tore a lion he met in the way with his hand, and slew a thousand Philistines with the jaw bone of an ass. At length he was captivated by the wiles of a woman, who delivered him up to the Philistines. They put out his eyes and condemned him like a beast to grind in a mill. The lords of the Philistines being assembled on a certain day in a large hall to celebrate the festivity of their idol Dagon, Sampson was brought out of his prison to play before them for their sport and diversion. There desiring to die with his insulting enemies, he took hold of the pillars which supported the edifice, and with his hands shook them so violently together, that the whole building fell down and buried him with three thousand of the Philistines under its ruins.

Sampson's death (say the holy fathers) was an

emblem of that great overthrow which Christ, by his death, gave to the infernal powers. It was then (says St. Paulinus) that the temple of Satan was pulled down, and the pride of his bold associates was humbled to the dust.

The Philistines were an idolatrous people, whom God at that time let loose upon the Israelites, and employed as a scourge to punish them for their crying sins, as he had before employed the Mesopotamians, the Moabites, the Madianites, Jabin and Sisara, for the same purpose. In the days of Heli the High Priest, by a visible stroke of Divine Justice, the armies of Israel were put to flight, and their country was plundered by the Philistines. Ophni and Phinees were killed, with 30,000 of the common men; the rest saved themselves by a shameful flight, and left the Ark in the hands of their enemies; which Heli being informed of, fell backward from his seat, broke his neck, and died upon the spot. (1 Kings iv.) The joy that the Philistines felt at seeing themselves masters of the Ark, was quickly changed into mourning; having placed it in the temple of Dagon, the helpless log was thrown, by Divine Power, down to the ground, and cleft of its hands and head. The arm of God then extended itself from the idol, to the idolaters themselves, and chastised them with dreadful scourges and calamities, until they sent back the Ark into the Hebrew territories, where it was lodged in Gabaah, and became an instrument of many blessings that flowed in upon the whole country. (1 Kings v. vi.)

The state of affairs in Israel began then to wear a more pleasing aspect. The Israelites humbled themselves under the hand of God, and God relented in his wrath, and appointed Samuel to judge

and govern the nation. Samuel was a faithful priest and prophet, trained up to virtue from his infancy under the care of Heli. (1 Kings i.) He was the last of the Judges. For twenty years he governed the Hebrew nation with prudence and with the affections of a father, and as long as he was at their head, neither the Philistines, nor any other enemy, durst molest them in the field. (1 King vii.) Peace was restored, and public virtues flourished. But when infirmity of age had rendered him unequal to the weighty charge, this pleasing prospect gradually declined. He communicated a share of his authority to his sons, but they had no share of their father's virtues. Their conduct in the administration of justice gave the Israelites a plausible pretext for proposing a change in their form of government, and for petitioning for a king like other nations. Almighty God having consented to their request, Saul, the son of Cis, of the tribe of Benjamin, was chosen to be their first king; but he soon forfeited his crown, and was reprobated for his sins. (1 Kings viii. xv.) Their second king was David, of the tribe of Juda, from whom the Saviour of the world was to come, according to the prediction of Jacob. (1 Kings xvi.) David was consecrated with holy oil by the prophet Samuel; and the other kings were consecrated after the same manner, for which reason they were called *Christ's*, that is to say, anointed. David was a long time persecuted by Saul. (1 Kings xix. xx.) The comfort that he administered to him by the melodious sounds of his harp, did not hinder that unhappy prince from attempting to take away his life. Very unlike his generous son Jonathan he grew jealous and swelled with envy to hear it sung, (after David's victory and glorious



triumph over Goliath, 1 Kings xvii. xviii.) that David had killed his ten thousands, whilst, Saul had killed but a thousand.—The comparison provoked his spleen, and prompted him to destroy a person whom he had hitherto considered as one of the most deserving of his subjects, and to whom he actually stood indebted for the preservation of his crown. So fatal and so blind a passion is envy, that the most deserving are commonly the chief objects of its rancour. The very appearance of merit in another, is enough to make it shoot its sting; and the more shining that merit is, the more envenomed is its malice. David, on the other hand, was so far from retaliating, or seeking revenge, or offering any violence to Saul, that the only return he made was meekness, forbearance, and generosity. He had it in his power at different times to free himself, with one stroke, from the persecution of a tyrant who sought his life; but he was too well principled, and had too great

a love of virtue, to commit a base action, or lift his hand against the Anointed of the Lord. Nay, he shed tears of real sorrow, and rent his garments with grief, when he was informed of the death of his implacable enemy. (1 Kings xxvi. xxxi. and 2 Kings i.) David having ascended the throne, found himself engaged in a civil discord with Isboseth, the son of Saul, for seven years. During his reign he waged several other bloody wars with the Jebuseans, Ammonites, Idumeans, Philistines, and other ancient enemies of his country, (2 Kings x.) whom he made tributary to the crown of Israel. Jerusalem was the place of his residence. He there built a palace on Mount Sion, called, from his name, the city of David, whither he caused the Ark of the Covenant to be translated with great solemnity. (2 Kings vi.) Gratitude to God made him turn his thoughts upon the public duties of religion. He designed to have built a magnificent Temple, in which the Ark might be placed, and sacrifices might be offered; but God gave him to understand, that the honour of building a fixed temple for the Divine service, was reserved for his son. Amidst the sweets of domestic repose, he met with a more fatal stroke than ever he had to fear in the field of war.—By a weakness inherent in human nature he fell into the abyss of sin. His crime is recorded in holy writ, as a caution that all may be upon their guard, lest, by presuming too much on their own virtue, they chance to fall into the like misfortune. (2 King xi.) His repentance is also recorded, that such as have had the misfortune to imitate him in sinning, may likewise imitate him in shedding tears of penance all the days of their life. Overwhelmed with grief, and yet borne up by hope, (as St. Chrysostom

takes notice,) he exerted all the powers of his soul to blot out his guilt, and humbly submitted to the chastisements and sufferings which the prophet Nathan had pronounced against him, as a temporal satisfaction due to the divine justice, even after the guilt of sin had been remitted by contrition. (2 King xii.) He considered the disorders of his family, the death of his little son, the rebellion of Absalom, the revolt of his subjects, and the insults offered to him, as the effects and punishment of his own revolt against God, and therefore received all these afflictions as from the hand of God, with profound humility and perfect resignation and patience. (2 Kings xiii. xviii.) He was, indeed, most sensibly affected at the death of his darling but rebellious son Absalom, into whose heart Joab had struck three lances, as he hung with his hair entangled in the boughs of a thick-spreading oak; but what he lamented most bitterly was, the untimely and unhappy death of his soul. Some time after, David fell into new troubles, and fresh calamities. Vanity, which is a subtle vice, and to be apprehended even by the best of men, inspired him with a desire to know the number of his subjects. For this end he nominated commissioners, who, for near ten months, were employed in running over the whole country, and registering the inhabitants. According to the lists that were produced by Joab, it appeared that the number of the Jews amounted then to thirteen hundred thousand fighting men, five hundred thousand of whom were comprised in the single tribe of Juda. The book of Chronicles (ch. xxi,) makes the real number of the Jewish people amount to fifteen hundred and seventy thousand, besides the tribes of Levi and Benjamin, which were not

numbered, because (as the Scripture says) Joab unwillingly executed the king's orders. The king having thus satisfied his vanity, immediately saw his folly, and became sensible of the sin he had committed. A prophet came to him, on the part of God, to propose which of the three punishments he would choose, famine, war, or pestilence. The penitent king, judging it more expedient to fall into the hands of God than into the hands of men, chose pestilence, which accordingly began to rage with such violence, that in three days time it carried off no fewer than seventy thousand of his subjects. Penetrated with the most tender feelings for the sufferings of his people, he erected an altar, and offered an holocaust; he wept and prayed the whole time with such fervour, that the exterminating angel stopt his hand, and the evil ceased. (2 Kings xxiv.) David being perfectly acquainted with poetry and music, composed a great number of Psalms and Canticles, in praise of God, and in commendation of virtue. The Psalms have a powerful influence upon a soul that is well disposed to hear or read them; for (as St. Austin observes) nothing can be equal to the divine harmony of those sublime truths which are contained therein, and nothing contributes so powerfully to drive away the spirit of pride from our hearts, and awaken them to the voice of Heaven.

FIFTH AGE OF THE WORLD.

From the foundation of Solomon's Temple, 2992, to the end of the Jewish captivity under Cyrus, 3468, containing the space of 476 years.

Temple of Solomon. 3 Kings vi. viii. x.

AMONG the sons of David, God made choice of Solomon to reign after him; and to a wisdom superlatively greater than had yet been, or should be, granted to any man besides, he added riches and glory superior to what any king had possessed before him. He has displayed his wisdom in his writings, particularly in his Proverbs, or Moral Sentences. He composed a Canticle, where he represents the affection God bears to his Church under the image of the strongest Love that is found amongst men, which is that of a Bridegroom and his Bride. Nay, in the very beginning of his reign he gave such a specimen of his wisdom and sagacity, in deciding a dispute between two women, as excited the admiration, and gained him the esteem, of all his subjects. (3 Kings iii.) He was the first man who erected a Temple in honor of the living God, a Temple so rich, and upon so grand a scale, that the world at that time had seen nothing comparable to it. He laid the foundation of it in the fourth year of his reign, and completed it in the eleventh, which was the twenty-ninth of his age, and the three thousandth of the world. Thirty thousand of the ablest workmen and artificers of his own subjects were employed in constructing it; eighty thousand men were set to hew out stones, and shape them for the masons; and seventy thousand more were constantly occupied in carrying the materials as they were wanted.

Besides these, there were three thousand three hundred overseers, who had nothing to do but to inspect each department, and direct the whole.

The dimensions of the Temple contained three score cubits in length, twenty in breadth, and thirty in height. A porch was erected in the front, twenty cubits long, ten broad, and a hundred and twenty high. Adjoining the walls, around about the Temple, lay several courts, galleries, and ranges of chambers, in three stories, one above the other, for different uses. In the court before the Temple was the brazen altar of holocausts ; with ten large lavers of brass, for the convenience of washing such things as were to be offered in holocaust ; and an immense laver of founded brass, supported by twelve brazen oxen, of which three looked to the east, three to the west, three towards the north, and three toward the south ; it measured ten cubits from brim to brim, five in height, and thirty in circumference, and was called the *Molten Sea*, on account of its prodigious size ; the use of it was, for purifying the priests before the daily performance of their sacerdotal functions. The Ark of the Covenant was placed in the inner part of the Temple, called the *Holy of Holies*, which was inclosed with a cedar partition from top to bottom, with two folding doors richly carved and gilt. A veil of violet, purple, scarlet, and silk, decorated with cherubims richly wrought, hung against the partition. The High Priest was the only person who had leave to enter into the Holy of Holies, once a year, with the blood of victims ; this sacred place being a figure of Heaven, which was shut against man, till Christ, our High Priest, entered there covered with his blood. (Heb. ix.) The images of two cherubims, ten cubits high, stood

upright, facing the sanctuary, with their wings extended, each wing being five cubits long. In the Sanctuary, stood the altar of incense, covered with gold, with ten golden candlesticks, five and five on each side. There were, moreover, ten tables covered with gold, for the loaves of show-bread; censers also, and vessels for the perfumes, bowls and mortars of pure gold, and vast quantities of other sacred furniture for the divine service. (2 Chron. iii. iv.) The floor was paved with beautiful and precious marble; the walls and the arched ceiling both of the Oracle and Sanctuary, were embellished with carvings in relievo, with cherubims, palm trees, and divers figures, and plated with the purest gold, and the plates were fastened on with nails of gold.

There was only this one Temple allowed in all the land of Israel; and it was ordained by the law, that sacrifices should there only be offered up to the Lord, to denote thereby that there is only one God, one Church, and one Religion. When the Temple was finished with every requisite both for use and ornament, Solomon prepared for the solemnity of its dedication. The festivity lasted fourteen days, during which time no fewer than twenty-two thousand oxen, and one hundred and twenty thousand rams, were offered in sacrifice to the living God, whose majesty filled the Temple, and caused Fire to descend from Heaven to consume the holocausts. But, alas? these glorious beginnings of Solomon's reign were sullied by a disgraceful end; for after having built a Temple of stones and timber in his youth, he went astray in an advanced age, and shamefully profaned the living Temple of his own Body, by giving himself up to sensual pleasures. The Scripture informs

us of his sin, (3 Kings xi.) but makes no mention of his repentance. Some indeed think he repented, and that in his book of Ecclesiastes is expressed the sorrow of his heart for having sinned, and the Vanity he found in all his criminal pleasures. Vanity of Vanities, is the sentence he has pronounced upon them; all is Vanity and affliction of mind, unless it be to love God, and serve him alone.

The schism of Samaria. 3 Kings xii. xiii. xvi.

To punish the sins of Solomon, his kingdom was divided after his death. None but the two tribes of Juda and Benjamin submitted to his son Roboam, whilst the other ten tribes withdrew from their allegiance to the house of David, and chose Jeroboam for their sovereign. Thus began the long and fatal schism of Samaria, and two distinct kingdoms were erected within the limits of a single nation. The kingdom of the ten tribes was called the *kingdom of Israel*, or of Ephraim; and *Samaria*, by reason of the town, which was afterwards the capital of it; and the kingdom which remained with Roboam was called the *kingdom of Juda*, whereof Jerusalem was the capital. Roboam raised an army of a hundred and eighty thousand men, with an intention to pursue his just rights, and compel the ten tribes of Israel, by the force of arms, to acknowledge his authority; but an inspired man, whose name was Simeias, forbade him on the part of God, to proceed against his brethren of Israel, because nothing had happened in this revolution of affairs but as God himself, who disposes of the the state of nations, had said by his prophet Ahias.

Jeroboam seeing himself master of the ten tribes, adopted a system of politics, and contrived a New Cult, that his subjects might not, by going to perform the public duties of religion in the Temple of Jerusalem, be induced to return to the allegiance of their former sovereign. He erected two golden calves, one in *Bethel*, the other in *Dan*. and ordered divine honors to be paid to them, as to the Gods who had brought the Israelites out of Egypt. He set up two stately altars; appointed priests who were not of the tribe of Levi; and in the worship of his idols he strove to imitate the form that was observed at Jerusalem in honor of the true God. He himself was the grand performer of his superstitious ceremonies. As he was one day offering incense at Bethel, the altar split asunder at the voice of a prophet from Juda; which enraged him to that degree, that he called upon his guards to take the man of God into custody, and stretched forth his hand against him with violence; but his hand withered and became motionless, until he miraculously recovered the use of it by the prophet's prayer. He enjoyed but little peace in his new acquired kingdom, and maintained it only by hard struggles and perpetual bloodshed. It is related, in the 13th chap. of the book of Chronicles, that he brought into the field, at one time, an army of eight hundred thousand chosen troops, and that five hundred thousand of them were slain by an army commanded by Abias, the son of Roboam, and consisting of four hundred thousand well disciplined men.

After a troublesome reign of two-and-twenty years, Jeroboam finished a wicked life by an unhappy death. His name is never mentioned in the holy Scriptures but with detestation, on account

of his having set up the worship of idols, which was followed by all the kings, his successors, in the throne of Israel, till an end was put to that kingdom by the Assyrians, two hundred and fifty four years after it had been first severed from that of Juda.

Most of the kings of Juda were also vicious, cruel, and idolatrous. The piety and zeal for religion which distinguished the reign of some of them, drew down the blessing of God upon their arms, and became the source of many glorious victories, which the armies of Juda gained against their enemies. On the contrary, the Almighty often scourged them and their subjects for their sins, as he often spared and shewed mercy for the sake of those who were truly virtuous, and who endeavoured, by their prayers and good works, to avert his wrath and disarm his justice. We read in the third book of Kings, 14 c. that in the fifth year of Roboam's reign, on account of his and the people's sins, God delivered them over to Sesac, king of Egypt, who having taken the strongest cities of Juda, plundered Jerusalem, and robbed the temple of its treasures, and of the gold and silver shields, which Solomon had bestowed. On the other hand, Asa, the grandson of Roboam, and father of Josaphat, who banished the worship of idols, and restored good order amongst his subjects, and who in his general conduct, had been a religious prince, gave a total overthrow to the vast army of Zara the Ethiopian, who invaded the territories of Judea with a million of men. (2 Chron. xvii.) Trusting in the hand of God more than in the force of his arms, he saved his country, and became so formidable to his enemies, that they were not able to stand against him in the field.

It is true indeed, he afterwards incurred the displeasure of God, as the prophet Hanani signified to him; and he is blamed in the Scripture, for relying more upon the skill of his physician, when he was sick, than upon the help of God.—He was succeeded by his son Josaphat, a prince not less distinguished for his religion, than for his kingly virtues. Constant success attended his arms, and God heaped honors and glory upon him. Joram, his son and successor in the throne of Juda, inherited no share of the father's virtue, but in wickedness resembled the kings of Israel. He murdered his brothers, and introduced the worship of Baal amongst his subjects. The punishment of these crimes was the loss of Edom, which revolted, and a painful sickness, which put an end to his short and miserable reign. (4 Kings ix.) His son Ochozias succeeded him both in his crown and vices, and was slain by Jehu. Joas, his youngest son, mounted the throne of Juda, after a six years' usurpation of it by the ambitious and cruel Athalia. Whilst Joas was guided by Joiada, he took great pains to repair the temple, and to make piety and religion flourish; but after the death of Joiada, being surrounded by impious courtiers and flatterers, he set up idols, and adored them, and murdered the high priest Zacharias in the great court between the altar and the temple. In punishment of his sins, the Syrians broke into his territories, and having with a handful of men routed an infinite multitude of Jews, and executed the most shameful judgment on Joas—the unhappy prince was assassinated in his bed by two of his own servants. (2 Chron. xxiii. xxiv.) His son Amasias began in like manner his reign in prosperity, but ended with disgrace, his impious conduct having

drawn upon him the displeasure of Almighty God. (4 Kings xiv.) He was succeeded in the throne of Juda by his son Ozias, who is also called Azarias. He was a prince of great abilities, which he employed for the good of his subjects and increase of religion, till towards the end of his life, having forgot his station, and trespassed upon the rights of the priesthood, he was struck with a leprosy and thrust out of the sanctuary. Joatham, his son and successor, was an excellent prince, and possessed of every quality that constitutes a great and virtuous king. But Achaz his son, was the worst of men that had yet disgraced the crown of Juda. Vicious by nature, and by principle addicted to the superstitions of the kings of Israel, he cast statutes to Baal and renewed the abominations of idolatry even in the holy city. He took down the great laver, removed Solomon's brazen altar, shut up the temple, purified his son by fire, according to the rites of the Gentiles, and offered sacrifice upon the hills, and in the groves, and places of idolatrous worship. In punishment hereof his kingdom was miserably torn to pieces, and plundered of its riches, by the kings of Israel and Syria. No less than a hundred and twenty thousand of the troops of Juda were slain in one day, and two hundred thousand women and children, with an immense booty, were carried away to Samaria. But the more he was chastised, the more reprobate he grew. He immolated victims to the idols of Damascus, set up their statues at the corner of every street in Jerusalem, and built them altars in the cities of Juda, where he ordered frankincense to be burnt in their honor. Provoked by such outrages, God would no longer bear with his impiety, and by an untimely death he cut

him off the face of the earth in the thirty-sixth year of his age. (4 Kings xvi.) The impiety of this abandoned prince is a shocking spectacle of the depravity of human nature ; and the obstinacy with which he resisted every admonition that was sent to make him sensible of his crimes, is a proof that obduracy of heart is the greatest punishment which happens to a sinner on this side the grave. Final impenitence is the beginning of that painful reprobation, which shall never end.

The Prophets. 3 Kings xvii. xviii. xix. xxi. xxii.

AFTER the division of the two kingdoms of Israel and Juda, God was pleased to raise such a number of Prophets, to comfort and instruct the true faithful, and to reclaim, admonish, and chastise the impious and rebellious, that this period may well deserve the name of the Prophetic æra. All those are called Prophets, whom God filled with his holy Spirit, and to whom he discovered hidden things ; for it is the Spirit of God, or the Holy Ghost, who spoke by the Prophets, and who only could give them an insight of things to come, insomuch that Prophecy is one of the most convincing proofs we have of the Divinity ; which made one of the holy Prophets confidently say to the Idols of the Gentiles, by way of insulting them, *Tell us the secrets of futurity, and we will say ye are Gods.* Moyses, Samuel, David, and Solomon, were Prophets. But this name was given particularly to those who were remarkable for their frequent fasts, rigorous austerities, and retired life. Some of them have left writings, and are classed into Greater and Minor Prophets. Isaiah and Jeremiah, with Ezechial and Daniel, are called the Greater Prophets, because they are

more diffuse and voluminous in their writings. There are twelve others, who not being so extensive, are commonly called the Minor Prophets.— They foretold the destruction of Samaria and Jerusalem, and the subsequent Captivity of the inhabitants, with all that has happened since. With these Predictions they remarked distinctly all the particular circumstances of the Coming of the Messiah, of his Birth, Life, Passion, and Death, and of the New Covenant he was to make with his people, and all this in a stile so clear and intelligible, that Porphyry, the great enemy of Christianity, represented their Prophecies as written by an Historian who relates past events, lest he should be obliged to confess the truth of the Christian religion, and acknowledge that One Sovereign God of the universe, to whom it can only belong to comprehend the boundless extent of ages. These holy men, who were sent both to Juda and Israel by the merciful Providence of God, in order to oppose the torrent of iniquity, and to rouse the faith of an offending people, zealously inveighed against the prevailing vices of the age, and exhorted sinners to renounce their evil ways, and to return to the religion of their forefathers. They warned them constantly against the dreadful calamities which their crying sins were to draw down upon their criminal heads, and admonished them to avert the strokes of divine vengeance by a timely repentance. But neither their threats, nor admonitions, had any effect upon that degenerate people. Instead of profiting by the salutary advice and instructions given to them, they ill-treated, insulted and persecuted the Prophets of the Lord, and put several of them to the most cruel deaths. It is related in

the third book of Kings, c. xviii. that no less than a hundred Prophets were compelled at one time, to screen themselves from the fury of their persecutors by lying concealed in subterraneous caves, where they were privately fed with bread and water by a man of extraordinary virtue, called Abdias, the intendant of the palace of Achab king of Israel. The most famous Prophets of those times were Elias and Eliseus, who zealously exerted the power they had received from God, of working the most stupendous miracles in support of the true religion. By his prayers Elias shut up the Heavens from giving any rain for three years, which occasioned a dreadful Famine over the land. Whilst others felt the severe punishment due to their sins, the Prophet was miraculously fed by ravens, which brought him bread and meat every morning and evening to the torrent, which he had chosen for his retreat. When the spring of the torrent was dried up, he was directed by God to go to Sarephta, a town of the Sidonians, where a widow woman would provide him with the necessities of life. As he came near the town, having met the poor woman picking up a few sticks, he asked her for something to eat and drink. She answered him, that a handful of meal and a little oil was all she had for the support of herself and her son; and that she was going to dress it for them both, that they might eat and die. The holy man comforted the woman in her distress, bade her first go and make him a little cake of the meal and oil she had, and after that make for herself and her son; for that neither the one nor the other should fail, as long as the Drought continued. The widow did as the Prophet desired her. Both he, and she, and her family eat, and from that day

the pot of meal did not waste, nor was the oil diminished.—But the death of the widow's only son, happening soon after, changed her joy into sorrow. The Prophet, moved with compassion for the distressed mother, took the breathless corpse out of her arms, and, by his prayers, raised the dead child to life. Elias, burning with zeal for the honor and glory of the living God, and deeply concerned at seeing the people of Israel so long led astray, and flattered in their evil ways by the false prophets of Baal, who spoke nothing to them but what they knew would be agreeable, resolved at length to meet king Achab in person, and with undaunted fortitude he told him, that by leaving the true God and sacrificing to Baal, he and his family were the cause of the heavy disasters that distressed the nation. To convince him hereof, he requested that the king would assemble the people of Israel and the prophets of Baal together, on mount Carmel. In compliance with his request, a meeting being ordered to take place upon the mountain, Elias challenged all the prophets of Baal, who were in number four hundred and fifty, to decide the controversy between them and him, and not to keep the people any longer in suspense between the two parties. 'Let two bullocks be given us,' said he; 'let them take one, and lay it upon an altar; I will take the other and do the same; but let no fire be put under either. We will each in our turn call upon the God whom we respectively adore, and he who shall answer by sending down Fire from Heaven to consume the holocaust, shall be acknowledged for the true and only God.' The people with one accord approved of the proposal. The prophets of Baal began to dress and prepare

their sacrifice. They laid their victim upon the altar, and called upon Baal from morning till mid-day, but received no answer. 'You call not loud enough,' said Elias; 'Baal does not hear you; strain your voices higher; your God is perhaps asleep, or on a journey, or talking, or at an inn.' Piqued at the Prophet's raillery, they exerted themselves anew, they bawled loud, they leaped over the altar, they slashed themselves with knives and lances, but could get no answer from Baal. The hour of mid-day being now elapsed, Elias laid his disjointed victim on an old stone altar, and ordered water to be poured upon the wood, that was piled upon it, until it was thoroughly soaked. He then addressed himself to the living God, and prayed that he would manifest his glory to the children of Israel, and convince them that he was the Lord their God. He had no sooner spoke, than the fire of Heaven descended, and consumed not only the holocaust, but the whole pile, and the very stones of the altar. The evidence of the miracle answering exactly to the true Prophet's proposal, left no room for any doubt to reply. The people fell flat upon the ground, and confessed that the Lord was the only God. They seized on the four hundred and fifty Prophets of Baal, and put the cheats and impostors immediately to death, as their crimes deserved. Elias then prayed a second time, that God would open the Heavens, and let his Rain fall again upon the earth. The clouds, as he prayed began to gather, and scarce had the people time to reach the town of Jezrahel, before a copious fall of Rain ensued. When the wicked queen Jezabel was informed by king Achab how her Prophets had been put to death, she sent to let Elias know, that

before the end of four and twenty hours, he should experience the same fate. The holy Prophet therefore fled into a lonely desert where being strengthened by an Angel of the Lord with a miraculous bread, which by the commentators of holy writ is considered as an emblem of the blessed Eucharist, whereby the souls of the faithful are nourished with spiritual life during their pilgrimage on earth, he continued his journey for forty days and forty nights together, till he arrived at the mountain of Horeb, and concealed himself there in a cave. He then received an order from God to repair back through the desert to Damascus, and to anoint Hazael king of Syria, Jehu, to be king of Israel, and Eliseus to be Prophet. By the command of God he went to Achab and upbraided him with the murder of the innocent Naboth. He forewarned him of his doom, and of the utter extirpation of his race, and told him, that the dogs should lick up his blood where they had licked up the blood of Naboth, and that Jezabel, his wife, should be devoured by dogs in the field of Jezrahel. Achab, on hearing the dreadful sentence, humbled himself in fasting and haircloth, whereby he moved the Almighty to put off the full completion of this punishment to the days of his son Joram, when Jehu extirpated the male issue of that unhappy prince, and the heads of seventy of his sons were sent to him in baskets by the citizens and chief men of Samaria, and the Prophet's sentence against Jezabel was carried into execution and literally fulfilled. (4 Kings ix.) Before Elias was taken up from earth into Heaven in a fiery chariot, with fiery horses. (4 Kings ii.) two captains, with two distinct companies of fifty men each, being sent by Ochozias to apprehend

him, because he had foretold the death of that impious prince for having had recourse in his distress to Beelzebub, the prince of darkness, as if there were no God in Israel, the Prophet caused Fire to descend from Heaven and consume the captains with their men. This is the last public action, that is related of Elias.—After his miraculous translation, Eliseus began immediately to give convincing proofs that he had received the two-fold spirit of Prophecy and Miracles. With the mantle of Elias he divided the waters of the Jordan. He rendered the waters of Jericho wholesome, by casting salt into the spring. In his way to Bethel, two Bears ran out of the neighbouring forest, and destroyed two and forty wicked boys, who, perceiving him to be bald, had insulted and impudently miscalled him. It is related in the fourth book of Kings, 3rd chap. that when the kings of Israel, Juda, and Edom, were marching against the Moabites, through the dry and barren desert of Idumea, and their armies were greatly distressed for want of water, Eliseus being applied to, and requested to pray for them, he caused a copious stream of water to overflow the country next morning, for their relief.—A poor widow being also oppressed with debt, and threatened by her creditor with the seizure of her two children, applied for relief to the holy prophet. He therefore multiplied a small quantity of oil which she had, so wonderfully, as to fill all the empty vessels she could find amongst her neighbours, and to enable her not only to satisfy her creditor, but to support herself and her family. (4 Kings iv.) By his prayers he recalled life into a child that was dead in the town of Sunam, and restored him to his afflicted mother —He cured a Syrian General, by

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name Naaman, of an inveterate leprosy, by ordering him to wash himself seven times in the Jordan; and punished the covetousness of his own servant-man, Giezi who was in an instant covered with a leprosy, and shared of Naaman's disorder, as by a lie, he had shared of his money. (4 Kings v.) He had the gift of knowing absent things as if they had passed before his eyes, and gave the king of Israel timely notice of the ambushes and schemes, that were laid in the court of Syria for surprising him. (4 Kings vi.) During the siege of Samaria, which reduced the inhabitants to such extremities, that some mothers agreed to kill and eat their own children, the Prophet consoled the king with the promise of speedy relief, and accordingly the very next night, the numerous army of the insulting Syrians being struck with a sudden panic, and scattered like dust before the wind, the siege was raised and the city was relieved, according to the prediction of Eliseus. (4 Kings vii.) Some time after the Prophet died, and the glory for which he had been so renowned on account of his miracles during life, accompanied him even to the tomb; for in the same year of his death, some inhabitants of the country were carrying a dead man to be buried, and being suddenly terrified at the appearance of a roving party of Moabites, they hastily threw him into the grave of Eliseus. The dead body no sooner touched the bones of the holy Prophet, but the man came to life, and stood upon his feet. Great, no doubt, (says St. Ambrose,) is the miracle by which a dead Body is restored to life; but the resurrection of a Soul from the death of sin to a life of grace, is infinitely more worthy of our attention. When the Body thus revives, it is soon to die again; such a life is no

more than the beginning of another death. But the life that a Soul recovers by being called from the state of mortal sin, is the beginning of a life that never ends ; its happiness is to be with God in everlasting glory.

Destruction of the kingdom of Israel. 4 Kings xvii.

WHEN Jeroboam the son of Joas, king of Israel, and the second of that name, swayed the sceptre of Israel, he restored that kingdom to its ancient territories, and confined the Syrians to the limits of their own empire. He was a wicked but a valiant prince. Under him lived the prophet Jonas, well known for his mission to the great city of Ninive, the capital of the Assyrian empire. (Jon. iii. iv.) Of all the prophets, employed in the ministry of God's word, Jonas was the first who preached to the Gentiles, and in that became the representative of Jesus Christ, from whom the grace of salvation flows both upon Jew and Gentile. The example of the Ninivites is recorded in holy writ, not only to shew the merit of fasting and penitential works, but also to encourage sinners to a true repentance. The Almighty God, moved by the united tears, prayers, and fasts of the king and subjects of that repenting city, did not execute the sentence which he had inspired his Prophet to pronounce, but, out of regard to their penitential works, reserved them to punish the incorrigible and unrepenting Israelites, to whose idolatrous crimes no end could be put but by a dissolution of their empire. To reclaim them from their evil ways, and to bring them back to the religion of their forefathers, God never ceased to admonish them, either by temporal calamities, or by the preaching of his prophets. The magni-

ficent Temple of Jerusalem was a standing monument of the worship they had left, and of the true religion which they had forsaken. The Almighty suffered their impiety with an admirable patience, and waited a long time for their conversion, but their impenitence provoking his just indignation, he at last executed his menace, and abandoned them to their enemies. Soon after Osee, their last king, had seized upon the crown, Salmanazer, the king of Assyria, invaded the kingdom of Israel with a powerful army, and compelled Samaria to surrender, after a siege of three years. To prevent all future revolts, he collected the ten tribes together and transported them under the direction of proper leaders, into the territories of the Medes and Assyrians. The Israelites from thence were dispersed into the northern parts of Asia, and neither they nor their posterity ever returned into their own country, which was given to other colonies, and to a medley of people, sent from the provinces of Asia, in place of the Israelites, and afterwards called *Samaritans*.

Amongst the many thousands of Israelites who were led away by Salmanazer, and scattered through the Assyrian empire, there was one who for his virtues is distinguished from the rest, and whose history is recorded in the holy scripture, for the instruction of after ages. (Tob. ii.) He was of the tribe of Nephtali; by name Tobias. His usual residence was at Ninive. In this virtuous man, the change of circumstances and country, made no alteration of principles and conduct. With the same steadiness he walked in the same path of virtue, and made it his study and practice to give all the comfort and assistance he could to his fellow captives. To console the afflicted, to

help the sick, to bury the dead, were the daily exercises of his charity in the midst of an idolatrous people. Being blessed with a son, he thought it his great duty, to be careful of his education, and to instruct him betimes in the fear of God. Such virtues merited him a reward even in this life. (Tob. v. xi.)

Ezechias, Manasses, &c. kings of Juda. 4 Kings xviii. xix. xx. xxii.

THE history of past transactions shews, that the Potentates of the earth have no other power but what they hold from God, who either indulges or restrains them in the exercise of it as he pleases. He suffers them to rage no longer than is conducive to his designs; and at his own time he rescues from their hands whomsoever he decrees to save. They are as little able to resist him, as the least of their subjects. In the hour of their prosperity they may thunder at others (says St. Austin,) but the God of Heaven, when he pleases, hurls down the vengeance which is due to their impiety. The kings of Juda continued for above an age after the total ruin and destruction of the kingdom of Israel. The kingdom of Juda, which had been reduced to the brink of ruin under the wicked Achaz, began to recover itself under the auspices of the pious Ezechias. The Scripture gives this testimony of him, that amongst all the kings who swayed the sceptre of Juda, either before or after him, there was not his equal. He steadily adhered to the Law of God, from which he never departed either to the right or to the left. His zeal for the divine service endeared him to the Almighty, who blessed his undertakings, and crowned his arms with success. His father Achaz,

had made the kingdom tributary to the Assyrian monarch ; Ezechias, unwilling to stoop to such an indignity, shook off the yoke, and rendered himself an independent prince.—Sennacherib, the son of Salmanazar, being greatly exasperated against Ezechias for refusing to pay the tribute which his father had promised, marched a powerful army into the kingdom of Juda, took many of the fortified cities, and obliged Ezechias to purchase peace at an enormous price. Sennacherib then drew off his troops, according to the articles of agreement, but, by a breach of faith, sent them back to take possession of Jerusalem, and dispatched messengers to Ezechias with letters full of threats and blasphemy. The holy king had recourse to God, by prayer, and in one night's time an angel passed through Sennacherib's camp and destroyed a hundred and eighty-five thousand of his army ; and if he was not involved with them, like Pharaoh, in the general ruin, it was (says St. Jerom) because the divine vengeance reserved him for the sword of his own children, who, a few weeks after his return to Ninive, assassinated him in the temple of his idol. At the time that Ezechias was straitened by the army of Sennacherib, he fell dangerously ill, and prayed earnestly to God for his recovery.—The great prophet Isaias, who lived under him, and was his director in all his doubts, and comforter in all his pains, made him a visit upon his bed of sickness, and admonished him to set his house in order, and prepare for death. Afflicted at the doleful summons, the King wept, and, with a lively faith and confidence, persisted still to pray for a longer life. The Prophet, after leaving him, felt himself suddenly inspired to go back and tell

him, that, in consideration of his prayers and tears, the Lord had granted him a reprieve ; that in three days he should be able to make his appearance in the Temple ; and that fifteen years more were added to his life ; in confirmation of which promises, the prophet wrought the celebrated miracle on the dial of king Achaz, in making the shadow of the index go ten degrees backward from the point it was then advanced to.

Berodach-Baladin, the king of Babylon, sent Ezechias presents and letters of congratulation upon the recovery of his health. An embassy from so great a monarch did not a little flatter the king of Juda. Pleased with the honor that was done him, he took a vanity in shewing to the Babylonian ambassadors his riches, the gold and silver vessels, the shining treasures of the temple and royal palace. Almighty God, who beholds the inmost recesses of man's heart, saw the vanity of the prince, and checked him for it. He sent Isaias to acquaint him, that since he was pleased the Babylonians should see his treasures, they should be all carried to the city of Babylon ; and that his children, as well as others of the royal race of Juda, should serve as eunuchs in the courts of Babylon.

Ezechias died at the end of fifteen years, and was succeeded by his son Manasses, under whom the prophet Isaias suffered martyrdom, being upwards of a hundred years old. This prophet, for his inimitable style and divine eloquence, and for his knowledge and clear insight into futurity ranks in the first place among the prophets. He speaks so explicitly, and with such precision, of Jesus Christ and his Church, that he seems to write more like a Historian penning down the

account of past or present transactions, than a Prophet who is foretelling the far distant events of ages yet to come.

Unfortunate Manasses being bereft of his pious father at the age of twelve years, an age too tender to be its own master and guardian, grew up in vice, and undid all that his father had done ; he sacrificed to Baal, set up idols in every temple, and caused the streets of Jerusalem to flow with innocent blood. These and the like crimes provoked Almighty God to denounce against Jerusalem the vengeance which he had already executed upon Samaria—to erase the city, and to deliver the remnants of his people into the hands of their enemies. The Babylonians soon after invaded Judea ; Manasses was defeated, taken prisoner, bound in fetters, and carried off to Babylon. The miseries he suffered there, however painful in themselves, became to him the spring of real happiness. Affliction gave him understanding, and brought him to a sense of his duty ; he acknowledged the justice of God in his punishment ; became a true penitent ; was released from his imprisonment ; restored to his kingdom ; and endeavoured, by public virtues, to repair the scandalous evils he had caused by public crimes. He was succeeded by his son Amon, who imitating the impiety, but not the repentance, of his father, died by the hands of his own servants, after a miserable reign of two years. The untimely death of Amon vacated the throne for his son, the celebrated Josias, a good and religious prince, whom the Almighty God hastened to draw out of the midst of iniquity, (says St. Ambrose,) that he might not behold the calamities which were ready to be poured down upon the kingdom of Juda.

Destruction of the Kingdom of Juda. 4 Kings
XXV.

THE rise and fall of empires is in the hand of God, who at certain times, raises one nation to chastise the sins of another nation, till the conquerors themselves deserve, by their crimes, to suffer the same vengeance, in their turn, of which they had been the instruments before. The kings of Assyria were at that time permitted to extend their conquests, for the punishment of those whom they subdued. Nabuchodonosor, not the king of Babylon, but another of that name, who reigned in Ninive, had formed a project of reducing the surrounding nations to his obedience, and making himself an universal monarch. For that purpose, during the reign of Manasses, he invaded the kingdom of Juda with an immense army of Assyrians, under the command of Holofernes, whom he ordered to conquer every kingdom in the west; for he fancied that no power would be able to stand against him. Holofernes advanced towards Bethulia, which was situated amongst the mountains of Galilea, with an army consisting of one hundred and twenty thousand foot and twenty two thousand horse. The trembling Jews saw the storm coming fast upon them, and endeavoured, by prayer and fasting, to engage the God of armies in their favour. The proud Holofernes was enraged to think that they could be hardy enough to oppose his arms; and sent Achior, the general of the Ammonites, bound in chains, into the city of Bethulia, there to wait his doom with the inhabitants of the place, because he had told him, that every effort to subdue the Jews would be in-

effectual, unless they had forfeited the protection of the God whom they adored. The Bethulians defended themselves with surprising vigor, until Holofernes cut off the conduit, and possessed himself of the spring that supplied the town with water. Their courage then sunk, and they insisted upon surrendering the city, until prevailed on by the tears and entreaties of Ozias, the commander, they agreed to wait five days longer. In the interim, Judith, a widow woman of more than ordinary virtue, feeling herself pushed on by a secret impulse to make some generous effort for the common good, formed a plan to visit Holofernes in his tent, and having succeeded in her hazardous enterprise, cut off the tyrant's head, routed his army, and saved her country for that time from destruction. (Jud. v. x. xiii.)

It was in the days of Eleacim, otherwise called Joakim, the eldest son of the pious king Josias, that the measure of Juda's iniquities was completed. This unhappy prince had the advantage of many living Prophets to point out the path of virtue, but he plunged into the depth of wickedness. The prophecy of Jeremiah being read to him, he cut it into pieces with a penknife, and threw it by scraps into the fire. The body of the people imitated the example of their king. They polluted the house of God, defiled the land with pagan crimes, insulted the Prophets, and laughed at the divine threats. Wherefore the long injured mercy of God was at length turned into justice, and Babylon became the scourge to reduce the people of Juda to the state, to which Ninive had reduced the people of Israel. Nabuchodonosor, king of Babylon, laid siege to Jerusalem, made Joakim his prisoner, bound him with chains, and carried

him with Daniel and other noble youths to Babylon, in the year of the world 3398. From that year is dated the first of the seventy years captivity, that the Jews endured in the country of Chaldea.

Joakim was afterwards put to a violent and disgraceful death. Joachin, alias Jehonias, his wicked son, with his mother, his wives and children, and the golden vessels and treasures of the Temple, were also transported to Babylon. Sedecias, the uncle of Joachin, after his sons were massacred before his face, had his eyes plucked out, was loaded with irons and carried away into captivity. Orders were then given to complete the ruin of Judea, to throw down the walls of Jerusalem, to demolish the Temple, the royal palace, and the rest of the houses; to strip the inhabitants of every valuable thing they had; and to suffer none to remain except the poor husbandmen, who were necessary to cultivate the vineyards and plough the lands. Nabuzardan, Nabuchodonosor's General, executed the orders of his royal master with a severe hand. Amongst the miserable Jews, who were collected for their transmigration into the country of Babylon, was the holy prophet Jeremiah, who out of respect for his eminent sanctity was left to his choice, either to accompany the captives, or remain in Judea. Compassion for the distressed husbandmen, who were left without help or counsel, determined him to choose the latter. But not being able to persuade that miserable remnant of the Jews, whom Nabuchodonosor had spared, to remain in their own native country, he accompanied them into Egypt, where he is said to have fallen a martyr to their resentment, for having reprehended them for

their idolatry. Thus was Judea abandoned by the remaining part of its natives, and reduced to a lonesome desert, as Jeremiah pathetically describes in the Lamentations, which the Spirit of God commanded him to pen down in another volume, with new threats added to the former. This zealous Prophet, with his Secretary and inseparable companion Baruch, never shrunk from their duty, nor ceased to admonish their fellow citizens of the impending calamities. Like a column of iron, or a wall of brass, they stood unshaken against the attacks of their enemies. They cautioned the Jews to guard against the corruptions of Babylon, lest in the midst of idolaters they might forget the religion of their ancestors and adopt the superstitions of the Gentiles. (Jer. xxxviii. Bar. ii.)

Captivity of Babylon. Daniel ii. iii. iv. vi. xii.
xiv.

THE Assyrian empire was split into three several kingdoms, the Median, Assyrian, and Babylonian. The metropolis of Media was Ecbatana, built by Arphaxed. Its walls were seventy cubits broad, and thirty cubits high, with towers a hundred cubits high. Ninive was the capital of the Assyrian monarchy, which afterwards became subject to the Medes and Babylonians. The principal city of the Babylonian kingdom, and where the kings resided, was Babylon, at that time the most powerful city in the world, but full of idolatry, superstition, debauchery, and all sorts of vices. It was built on both sides of the Euphrates, surrounded by a wall on which were many towers, three hundred and sixty furlongs in circumference; so magnificent a work, that on the

breadth of it six chariots and horses might set out together; the height was three hundred and sixty-five feet. There were a hundred gates all of brass, with doors and hinges in the circuit. The city was filled with houses of three and four stories. Near the citadel were the *Horti Pensiles*, or Hanging Gardens, with trees and meadows. Vaulted arches were raised from the ground one above another, increasing always in grandeur, to support the vast weight of this whole artificial garden. Babylon was improved with much art and expense, and raised to the highest pitch of grandeur by Nabuchodonosor. He was the most famous of the Babylonian kings. He subdued almost all the East. His victories, his great achievements, his immense riches and vast extent of empire, made him grow insolent, and inspired him with such notions of his own excellence, that he fancied himself to be something more than mortal. Having returned in triumph into his country with the spoils of Judea, he gave orders that some of the Jewish captives should be instructed in the language and manners of the Chaldeans, and qualified to appear at court in his royal presence. There were at that time in the midst of idolatry and corruption, many Jews who preserved their religion, and kept the law of Moyses; nay, there were even some great saints amongst them, who led a most innocent life. Amongst others, Daniel, a youth of the royal blood of Judea, and three more virtuous and comely youths, whose names were Azarias, Ananias, and Misael. These four youths were selected from amongst the rest, and committed to the care of a principal officer at court, with directions to see them daintily nourished with the provisions of meat and wine

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from the king's table. The religious Hebrews being afraid of eating any thing that was forbidden them by the law of Moyses, earnestly begged they might be allowed to try meagre diet and live upon Water and Legumes, which the officer, in whose care they were, consented to, with some difficulty, only for ten days, for he was apprehensive lest such a diet instead of nourishing might make them look pale and meagre, which he knew would displease the king. But at the end of the term there appeared upon their cheeks a more fresh and more healthy bloom, than in any of the other children who had been pampered with the king's delicacies. Hence we see how much God is pleased with a well regulated abstinence according to the order which he has established, and that it is not so much in the Food we take as in the Blessing which he gives it, that the nourishment of life consists. The four Hebrew children were presented to the king at the end of three years, and were found so well accomplished, that in science and wisdom they far surpassed the natives of the country. Daniel distinguished himself even above his companions. He shone with superior talents, and began to be known by his gift of prophecy, which he discovered very early in life, in the affair of the chaste Susanna. When yet a young boy, seeing her led to the place of execution, he publicly protested against a sentence, which he knew to be unjust. Though single and unsupported in the middle of a furious crowd, he raised his voice in favour of oppressed innocence, (says St. Bernard,) he detected the forgery and slander of the two old adulterous judges, and saved the life of the innocent person.

A skill more than human in interpreting dreams, such as had formerly paved the way to Joseph's preferment in Egypt, was the occasion of Daniel's rising to the highest dignity in Babylon. At his request, his three Hebrew companions, whose names were changed into Sidrach, Misach, and Abdenago, were appointed to preside over the public works in the province of Babylon. On their refusing to adore a golden statue, erected by Nabuchodonosor, they were cast into a fiery Furnace, where by a miraculous interposition of the divine power, they were preserved unhurt and untouched amidst the surrounding flames, and they came forth blessing the Lord and singing his praises. The pride of Nabuchodonosor was at length chastised in a manner the most humiliating, as a proof to all succeeding ages, that the greatest Potentates of the earth, are still but weak and feeble men in spite of all their prosperity and splendid opulence. That haughty monarch, according to the prediction of Daniel, was degraded from his throne, separated from the society of men, and driven out to dwell with wild beasts in the forest. A beast's heart was given him, and he ran away to eat grass like an ox, and was exposed to the dew of Heaven for seven years. During that time his hair grew out like the plumage of an eagle, and his nails became like the claws of a bird of prey. At the end of seven years he was cured of his pride, and convinced of the justice of that Divine Power which had humbled him, and which is ready to pardon and spare whenever his mercy is implored with sincerity and truth. Nabuchodonosor being reinstated in his kingdom and former glory, did not long survive his re-establishment. He was succeeded by his son Evilmerodach,

who seems to have been a friend to the captive Jews. Daniel enjoyed the same honors and favors at Court under him, as he had under his predecessor ; far however, from growing remiss in his duty to God in the midst of the Court and of the greatest employments, he made use of his power and interest to destroy the worship of the two favourite idols of the Babylonians, Bel and the Dragon. For this reason he was cast into a Den of seven hungry Lions, ready to devour him ; but the Lord who had saved the three Hebrew children in the fiery furnace, did not forget Daniel in the Lion's Den ; by the ministry of an angel he shut up the mouths of the ravenous animals for six days, and in the interim conveyed the prophet Habacuc, in a wonderful manner, through the air, with a sufficient provision of food for his faithful servant, until he was delivered out of his prison on the seventh day. Another persecution was raised against him in about twenty years after, on account of his steady piety and assiduity in prayer, and he was cast a second time into the Lion's Den, through the envy and jealousy of his enemies. but he was miraculously preserved as before. By such trials and sufferings God is pleased to polish the virtues of his saints, to strengthen their fidelity in his service, and to add a new lustre to their crown. Thus Abel's innocence was tried by Cain's malice ; thus was Jacob's patience proved by Esau's violence ; and David's meekness perfected by the persecution of Saul.

God was pleased to reveal great mysteries to Daniel, and to favor him with several visions relating to the succession of the four great monarchies of the Assyrians, Persians, Greeks, and Romans, and the reign and power of Anti-Christ.

(Dan. vii.) The prophet Ezechiel was likewise inspired by Almighty God, in the country of Babylon to instruct and comfort his fellow-captives by his prophetic visions. (Ezech. 1. 37.) The most important of Daniel's prophecies is that in which he specifies and determines the precise Time when the promised Messiah was to come, and the chief circumstances of his Birth, his Miracles, his Passion, and Resurrection, were to be accomplished. He foretold to Baltassar, the son of Evilmerodach, and the last of the Chaldean kings, the memorable revolution that was to extinguish the race of the Chaldean kings, and open the way which God had appointed for the re-establishment of the Jewish people. (Dan. v.) Cyrus, who commanded the Persian army for his uncle Darius the Mede, was then before the walls of Babylon, and having entered the city by a way which the Babylonians did not suspect, he surprised king Baltassar in his palace at night, and by his death put an end to the Chaldean empire.—The sudden and unforeseen stroke that carried off the wicked Baltassar at an hour he least expected, ought to be a warning (says St. Jerom) to all those Christians whose sinful excesses and impenitent lives expose them to the daily risk of being surprised by a like untimely end.

Afflictions of Job. Job i.

JOB, so well known for his humble Patience, united in himself two things which are seldom found in the same person, great Virtue and great Riches. The Scripture does not tell us when the holy man lived ; but he is supposed to have been the great grandson of Esau, and cotemporary

with the father of Moyses ; the text says he dwelt in the land of Hus, a plain and upright man fearing God and declining from evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, whom he carefully instructed in their duty to God, and educated in the principles of charity and union amongst themselves. He rose early in the morning every eighth day, and offered sacrifice for each one of them, that they might not only be purified from sin, but also sanctified by the divine blessing. Satan, who is always on the watch to tempt and seduce mankind, was vexed to see such virtues practised, and such happiness enjoyed, by a mortal inhabitant of the earth. He did not know what motive the holy man might have in all that outward shew of good ; whether the temporal felicity and worldly wealth which surrounded him, might not possibly be the ground of his Piety to God and make him thus active in the divine service. Being bent upon doing whatever mischief he was able, he asked the Almighty leave to strip Job of his possessions, not doubting but Adversity would make him break out into acts of impatience, and provoke him to blasphemy, like other men. Almighty God, who knew the unfeigned goodness of his servant's heart, and who was also willing to humble Satan's pride by showing him how impotent his malice was against a good man aided by Divine grace, gave him the leave he asked. Satan immediately began to try his utmost malice, and, as if he meant to make the holy man despair at once, poured out afflictions on him like a torrent, which by flowing in at once should allow him no time to recollect or arm himself against them. Four different messengers, one immediately upon the back of another, came to inform Job of his accumulated misfortunes,

that his herds were driven away by the enemy, his flocks killed by lightning, his servants slain, and his children crushed to death by the house falling in upon them as they sat at table. Job heard the melancholy tale, and though the sharpness of the stroke pierced his very heart, as appears by the rending of his garments, yet uttered no complaint. With an humble resignation to the divine will, he fell prostrate on the ground, adored, and said, 'Naked I came out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return to my mother earth; the Lord hath given, the Lord hath taken away; as it hath pleased the Lord, so it hath been done; let his name be for ever praised.' Thus the trials, which were designed by Satan to destroy, served but to confirm and strengthen the patience of the holy man. The malicious fiend, however, did not desist, but presented his petition to the Almighty a second time; for his power against the saints goes no further than God is pleased to let it; and his petition was to afflict Job's person. For the confusion of Satan's malice, the Lord granted him his request, with an express reserve not to hurt his servant's life. Satan therefore went and struck Job's body with one continued ulcer, from the top of his head to the sole of his foot. In that sore condition the holy man left his house, and seated himself upon the dung-hill, where with a shell he scraped off the corruption and the worms that swarmed from his ulcerous body. Of all his worldly goods nothing was then left him but his Wife, and she not for his comfort. She upbraided him for his simplicity, bade him blaspheme God, and die. Job bore the lash of her bitter tongue with the same patience as he bore his other sufferings, and only made her

this short answer : 'Thou talkest like one of the foolish women ; if from the hand of God we have received good things, why should we not receive likewise evil ?' Job in all this sinned not by word ; and the more nearly united to him the person was who reviled him, the more severe was the trial, and the more exemplary is his patience.

Friends of Job. Job iii.

Job being reduced to the piteous condition in which the sacred writer has described him upon the dunghill, met moreover with other trials, that seem to have affected him more sensibly. Three of his friends, who in the book of Tobias are styled kings, came to visit and condole with him in his misfortunes. But far from receiving any comfort from them, he was reduced to the disagreeable necessity of defending himself against their false and insidious reasoning. Amidst the evils he endured, his solid comfort was the uprightness of his heart, and the consciousness of his past innocence. He received his sufferings as trials to purify his virtue, like gold in the furnace. He considered the shortness of human life, and consoled himself with the thought of a future resurrection. 'I know,' says he, 'that my Redeemer lives ; that in the last day I shall rise from the earth ; and that with these very eyes I shall behold God my Saviour.' This was the faith, this the hope of holy Job, and this his three friends endeavoured to deprive him of. They strongly maintained to him, that his sufferings could be imputed to no other cause than his own guilt. According to the narrow notions of earthly men, they concluded that as his chastisement was grievous,

grievous also must have been his crimes. Nor did they content themselves with the simple proposal of their erroneous maxims, they strove to maintain them by sophistical arguments, and clothed their slanders with an air of plausibility.—Job stood in need of all his patience to support himself under this trial; he refuted their calumnies by solid reasoning, he asserted and proved his own innocence, he tried to convince them of their mistake, and adduced every argument to set them right; but they were not willing to be informed: and by their obstinacy we see how dangerous a thing it is to be misled by prejudices, and how hard a thing it is to remove an impression which has been once entertained. For having suffered themselves at first to be drawn aside by false appearances, that seemed to favor their erroneous notions, they would not afterwards believe but the sufferings of their friend were the sufferings of a criminal. God himself condescended in the end to justify the innocence of his injured servant. He shewed his indignation against the falsity of those pretended friends, treated their principles as folly, and declared, that he would not pardon them their sins, but at the request of him whom they had wickedly endeavoured to stigmatise with guilt.

Hence we are to learn, (say the holy fathers) never to judge ill of the good and virtuous on account of the disadvantages of life under which they may chance to labor; our judgment of another's goodness is not to be regulated by the riches and worldly honors of which he may be possessed. The true state of things is often very different in itself from what appears to our outward senses. They who seem the happiest in the

opinion of a deluded world, are frequently miserable within themselves, and despicable in the sight of God ; and those whom the world despises and rejects as unworthy of its notice, God honors with his friendship, and ranks amongst his saints. Job lived long enough to see his character fully justified, even in the opinion of a sensual world. In the latter part of his life, he was blest with health and riches in greater affluence than he had ever enjoyed before. In those darker ages of the world, such Visible Rewards seemed necessary for the encouragement of virtue ; but since the Son of God is become man, and has borne our pains, the enlightened Christian raises his notions higher. Not by his Senses, but by Faith, he forms his judgment of the Recompense which is due to good and evil.—Though left under the pressure of sufferings even to the end of life, he is neither staggered in his faith, nor dejected in his hope. He considers only those as real evils, which either sully or destroy the life of the soul, which is sanctifying grace ; and sets his heart on no other riches than what are invisible and eternal.

SIXTH AGE OF THE WORLD.

From the end of the Babylonian captivity to the birth of Jesus Christ, comprehending the space of 532 years.

The Temple and Walls of Jerusalem rebuilt.

1 Esdras i.

THE wrath of God against the Jewish people being appeased, and the term of their seventy years captivity, predicted by the prophet Jeremy, being complete, Cyrus, the conqueror and monarch of the East, published an edict, by which he granted leave to all the Jewish nation to return to their own country and rebuild the Temple. He likewise gave an order at the same time, that the sacred vessels which had been brought to Babylon by Nabuchodonosor, should be taken out of the royal treasury, and given back to be used in the Divine service, for which they were first designed. In consequence of this edict, upwards of forty-two thousand Jews marched back into Judea, under the conduct of Zorobabel, chief of the tribe of Juda, and grandson of king Joachin, or Jeconias. Upon their arrival at Jerusalem, they erected a temporary altar for their daily sacrifices, until the Temple they were preparing to re-build should be finished. The foundation of a new Temple being laid with great solemnity and loud acclamations of joy, the Samaritans, the ancient enemies of Juda and Benjamin, did all they could, both by open force and secret intrigue, in the court of Persia, to interrupt the building and frustrate its design. After the death of Cyrus, Cambysea, his son, was prevailed upon, by the repeated slanders

of the Samaritans, to put a stop to the building, till the second year of his successor, Darius Hystaspes, who not only ordered the building of the Temple to be resumed, but even contributed towards the expense. The Temple was entirely finished in the sixth year of his reign, and dedicated with great solemnity.

The Jews in Judea, having thus formed their re-establishment, continued to strengthen themselves, under the protection of the kings of Persia, Darius Hystaspes, Xerxes, and Artaxerxes, surnamed Longimanus. In the 7th year of the reign of Artaxerxes, they were joined by a fresh body of their brethren from Babylon, under the conduct of Esdras, a virtuous and learned priest, who made the law of God his peculiar study, and sedulously conformed his practice to the sanctity of its precepts. To him we owe the collection, revision, and transcript, of the copies of the sacred books. He appointed judges and magistrates to punish vice and establish good order. He regulated the sacrifices, enforced the observance of the laws, instructed the people in their duty, and represented to them the sad consequences of entering into alliances and contracting marriages with the idolatrous inhabitants of the land, which the Jews were forbid to do, on account of the danger of perversion, and falling off from the true faith. Esdras likewise proclaimed an extraordinary fast, that the people might avert the wrath of Heaven, and expiate their sins by works of Penance, as had been practised from the earliest times.

Whilst a part of the Jewish republic were thus assuming a regular form of government, and re-peopling and cultivating the country of Judea, the remaining part, in the provinces of Babylon, ran

great risk of being totally destroyed. The mighty Assuerus, (as he is called in the book of Esther, and is thought to be the same person as Darius Hystaspes,) had a favourite courtier whose name was Aman. Every mark of honor and royal favor was bestowed upon this haughty man, to whom all the king's servants about the court were commanded to bend the knee. The king's court was then at Susan. Aman received that servile homage from every one, excepting Mardochai the Jew, who was one of the captives whom Nabuchodonosor had carried away with king Jeconias to Babylon, and who had an apartment appointed him in the palace, because he had discovered a plot which two eunuchs had formed against the king's life.—Aman was exceedingly angry to see Mardochai refuse him an homage which the other chief servants of the king servilely paid him; and knowing him to be a Jew, resolved that not only he, but his whole nation, should feel the weight of his resentment. He took an opportunity of representing to the king, that the Jews were an insolent lawless people, who by their religious tenets embroiled the state and disturbed the peace of his subjects; that it was not safe to let them live; and that, for the good of the empire, they ought to be utterly extirpated. The credulous Prince implicitly believed what his Favorite told him, and gave him full power to act as he pleased in that affair. Aman had all he wanted; he drew up an edict, to which he affixed the King's seal, and peremptorily commanded, that on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month every Jew throughout the Persian dominions should be massacred, without distinction of age or sex. The publication of this cruel edict threw the Jews into the utmost

consternation ; they saw no resource but in God, whose mercy they implored by prayer and fasting. The Almighty in his goodness was pleased to provide for their safety, by the means of queen Esther, who was niece to Mardochai, and married to king Assuerus. (Esth. iv. v. vi.) In every circumstance of this interesting history, it appears how sweetly and how powerfully the Providence of God disposes all things to effect his designs, either for the punishment of the wicked or for the protection of the good. The king, whose credulity had been imposed on, was undeceived, and revoked the edict to which his royal seal had been affixed. He promoted Mardochai to the highest posts of honor, and by a just judgment of God condemned the criminal Aman to be hanged on a gallows fifty cubits high, which the day before he had erected at his own door for the execution of the innocent Mardochai. So truly verified was the sentence of our blessed Saviour, in which he has since declared, that *every one who exalts himself shall be humbled, and whosoever humbles himself shall be exalted.*

Artaxerxes, (the grandson of Assuerus, or, as he is otherwise called, Darius Hystaspes,) was a great favourer and protector of the Jews. It was in the twentieth year of his reign that Nehemias obtained a grant for rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, which he completed in less than two years, in spite of the opposition given by the Samaritans and other hostile neighbours ; for he placed a guard day and night to defend the workmen, and he taught them to use the Trowel and the Sword together. (2 Esdr. ii.) From this epoch begins the date of the prophet Daniel's seventy weeks of years, or 483 years, when Christ was to come and die upon a cross for the redemption of mankind.

Nehemias committed to writing what was done in Judea in his time. After his death the supreme power devolved to the High Priests.

Chastisement of Heliodorus and cruelty of Antiochus. 2 Mac. iii. v. vi.

JERUSALEM being in some measure restored to its ancient splendor, the Jews who remained in the provinces of Babylon, and who were dispersed among the Gentiles, enjoyed a long and prosperous peace, with the free exercise of their religion, under the Kings of Persia, till their power was ruined, and an end put to their empire, as Daniel had foretold, by Alexander the Great, king of Macedon, who laid the foundation of the empire of the Greeks. This renowned conqueror of the East had been figuratively shewn to the prophet Daniel in two different visions, first under the appearance of a winged Leopard with four heads, and then under the appearance of a Goat with four horns. These emblematical figures not only signified his rapid progress and great power, but also the division of his empire into four kingdoms, which sprung up after his death (about the year of the world 3680) under as many of his captains, to whom he had parcelled out his extensive territories. Thence came the Ptolemies, kings of Egypt, and the Seleucuses, kings of Syria. In this period were built the great cities of Alexandria, Seleucia, and Antioch, whose rise was the ruin of other cities in Asia, and particularly of Babylon. The kings of Syria resided at Antioch; and Alexandria was the capital of the kings of Egypt. It was in this city that Ptolemy Philadelphus, king of Egypt, founded a famous Library, which is said to have contained seven hundred

thousand volumes, and ordered the *Septuagint*, or the translation of the Scriptures into Greek, to be made by a number of learned Jews, called the *seventy interpreters*.

Judea continued to enjoy its full liberty under Seleucus and his successors, till the reign of Antiochus Epiphanes, whom Daniel seems to point out, in his eighth chapter, as a cruel persecutor of the Jews, and a profaner of the holy Temple. The general peace had, indeed, suffered some interruption under Seleucus Philopator; his brother and predecessor in the throne of Syria; for being informed by one Simon, an overseer of the Temple, that great sums of money were deposited in the treasury, he sent Heliodorus, his Commissary, to bring them away. Heliodorus, upon his arrival, signified the king's orders to Onias the high priest. Onias told him, that the monies in question had been deposited in his hands for the benefit of poor widows and orphans; that he was but the administrator of them, and could not deliver them up. Heliodorus replied, that it was not in his commission to examine how, and for what purposes, those monies had been there deposited, but to carry them to his master. The whole city was therefore in the greatest consternation; the people, with Onias at their head, fled for refuge to the throne of God, whom they besought with ardent prayers, that he would defend them against all violence, and not suffer his sanctuary to be plundered of its treasures. Their petition was heard. Heliodorus advanced as far as the entrance of the Temple, fully determined to seize by force what he could not obtain without it. The soldiers who accompanied him were, by the power of God, suddenly struck with dread, which cast them to

the ground, and deterred them from executing their leader's commands; for there appeared to them a man on horseback, clad in golden armour; and the horse on which he sat reared and violently struck his fore-feet against Heliodorus, while two comely young men, in rich attire, standing on either side, scourged him incessantly with rods that they had in their hands. Heliodorus dropt down speechless upon the ground, where he lay till he was taken up and carried off in a sedan chair; his friends immediately addressed themselves to Onias, humbly begging that he would call upon the Most High to grant life to the man, who was seemingly in the agony of death. Onias, being apprehensive lest the fact might be misrepresented, and the miraculous effect of God's power be construed into treason against the King, consented to their request, and by his prayers saved Heliodorus from death. The two heavenly young men, still standing by the side of Heliodorus, said to him, 'Return thanks to the priest Onias, for on his account our Lord hath granted thee life; and since thou hast received this visible chastisement from God, declare to all men the great and wonderful works of his Divine power.' Having said this, they both disappeared; and Heliodorus returned to Seleucus, and joyfully fulfilled the injunctions that were laid upon him.

Upon the death of Seleucus, his brother Antiochus, surnamed *Epiphanes*, or the Noble, took possession of the throne. This man was the son of Antiochus the Great, and became a barbarous persecutor of the Jewish nation, and a scourge in the hand of God to chastise a perverse people, who

at that period of time had fallen into great disorders, and provoked the Divine vengeance by their crying sins—Jason and Menelaus supplanted the good Onias in the dignity of the Priesthood by force of bribery and the dint of money; things sacred and profane were confounded together; and no attention was paid to laws either human or divine. Jerusalem was polluted with the blood of her own citizens, and dreadful times came on; which seems to have been foreboded by the tremendous signs which were seen over the city for forty days, and which filled the minds of the inhabitants with dreadful alarms; there was the appearance of soldiers glittering in golden armour; a multitude of men was seen in helmets, with drawn swords; troops of horsemen moving to and fro through the air, shaking their shields and encountering one against another. After all these unusual signs, Antiochus marched an army to Jerusalem, with a view of reducing it entirely to his obedience, and destroying the race and extirpating the religion of the Jewish people. The different factions of the citizens, tearing one another in pieces, gave him an easy conquest. He took the city by storm, and deluged the streets with human blood. For the space of three days he raged with the fury of a tyrant, and gave no quarter, to man, woman, or child. Fourscore thousand of the people were massacred, forty thousand made prisoners, and as many sold for slaves. The holy treasury was rifled; the sanctified vessels were taken away; the Temple was defiled with all sorts of revellings, and a statue of Jupiter Olympius was erected therein. Antiochus sent Apollonius with another powerful army, to slay all the men who had attained the age of manhood; and to sell the

youngest sort, with the women, for slaves. Another general was sent from Antiochus, to compel the Jews to offer sacrifice to the heathen idols, and to put every one to death who should refuse to follow the pagan rites. Several Jews bravely stood the severe trial, and ended their lives by martyrdom. Some, for having circumcised their children, were cast down headlong from the walls; while others were burnt alive in caves, where they assembled to keep the sabbath.

Martyrdom of Eleazar and of the Machabees.
2 Mac. vi. vii.

AMONGST the glorious champions who signalized their zeal for the religion of their forefathers under the cruel Antiochus, were old Eleazar and the youthful band of the seven brothers commonly known by the name of Machabees. Eleazar being apprehended by the king's officers, and, in contempt of the law, being violently pressed to eat swine's flesh, which they thrust into his mouth, he vigorously resisted, and preferred a glorious death to the dishonourable terms of life. He went on cheerfully towards the place of execution; when they who accompanied him, being moved with compassion and respect for his age, took him aside, and begged he would consent to let some legal meats be set before him, that by eating of them at least he might seem to comply with the king's order, which would be enough to save his life. The venerable old man was not to be imposed upon by such pretexts of friendship; he considered the unblemished character he had hitherto maintained through life, the testimony he owed to truth, and the respect due to the law of God in those particular circumstances, and rejected

the proposal with a nobleness of soul that was natural to him : ' I would rather die,' said he, ' than do what you counsel me ; such dissimulation becomes not these grey hairs. God forbid I should give occasion to the youth to imagine that Eleazar, at the age of fourscore and ten, has renounced the religion of his forefathers, and consented to the superstition of the pagans ! Miserable should I be, indeed, if the poor remains of declining life could tempt me to prevaricate in so shameful a manner. It is better for me to die courageously, and to teach my fellow citizens, by my example, that the laws of God are to be preferred to those of men, and that the duties of religion are to take place of wordly interest, and even of life itself.' He was forthwith carried to the place of execution, where, by a glorious death, he left to the whole Jewish nation an example of the most heroic fortitude ; and teaches us, by his conduct, with what caution we are to avoid whatever may be a subject of scandal to the weak, and in what manner we are to give glory to God by a sincere confession of the truth. Antiochus himself presided at the martyrdom of the Machabees ; and being enraged to see such constancy in an age so tender, he stretched every nerve to terrify and torture them into a compliance with his impious demands. He condemned them all to undergo the same torments one after another, that the sufferings of the foregoing might intimidate the next. The eldest was first called out, in the presence of his mother and the rest of his brethren, to enter upon the bloody combat. The executioner cut out his tongue, chopped off the extremities of his hands and feet, drew off the skin of his head, and then cast the mangled body into a large frying-pan,

where the remains of agonizing life were consumed by a slow fire. The first being thus barbarously slain, the second and the rest were successively tormented and slain in the same manner. Each advanced in his turn; each with the same manly fortitude bore the tyrant's tortures; and each with the same steady perseverance triumphed over his savage inhumanity. They cheerfully resigned a life which they hoped to receive one day again by a glorious resurrection. Six of the brothers being put to death, the seventh only remained, the youngest of them all, and him the tyrant hoped to gain by caresses and fair promises of friendship, wealth, and happiness. But finding his words made no impression either on him or his mother, he foamed with rage, and with fiercer barbarity he discharged his fury upon them both, and tortured them to death.

Mathathias and his five valiant sons. 1 Mac. ii.
iii. vi. ix. xiii.

DURING the scene of desolation which stained the land of Juda with the blood of its best citizens, Mathathias, surnamed Asmoneus, a valiant and religious man of the sacerdotal race, retreated with his family into Modin, a small town situated upon a hill, the former residence of his ancestors, where, covered with sackcloth and bathed in tears, he bewailed the misfortunes of his country. Many other Jews had also taken refuge at Modin, but were not long suffered to remain unmolested; for the King's deputies pursued them thither, and insisted on their abandoning the law of God and sacrificing to idols. Mathathias therefore summoned his fellow citizens who had any zeal for religion, to follow him and his five valiant sons,

John, Simon, Judas, Eleazar, and Jonathan, into the desert, where they retreated to the mountains, and endeavoured to shelter themselves from persecution, till, being joined by the most courageous and zealous of the people, their numbers swelled into an army strong enough to face their enemies in the field. Mathathias led them on against the King's troops, whom he forced to retreat before him, and to fly for safety beyond the boundaries of Judea. He scoured the whole country as he marched along with his victorious followers, overturned the profane altars that he met with, and restored to the inhabitants the free exercise of their religion. But death cut him short before he had time to finish what he had so prosperously begun. Before he expired, he endeavoured to inspire into the hearts of his gallant sons the same holy zeal that burnt in his own; he singled out Simon, for his prudence, to aid them by his counsels; and Judas, surnamed Machabeus, for his warlike valour, to command the army. Judas girded himself accordingly for battle, like a giant, (says the sacred historian,) and buckled on his sword, which was a shield to the whole army. He relied chiefly upon God for success, and believed that he alone held the balance of victory, and could turn the scale as easily in favour of a small as of a great number. He collected a body of six thousand chosen men, who had never bent their knees to the idols of Antiochus; for he judged that a wicked multitude would be more likely to draw down a curse upon his arms, than help him to conquer. Having prepared himself by prayer and fasting, he directed his first attack against Appollonius, and gained a complete victory over a great army commanded by him in Samaria

OLD TESTAMENT.

Soon after he gave a total overthrow to a numerous army commanded by Seron ; and in two other engagements he defeated forty thousand foot and seven thousand horse under the command of Ptolomy, Nicanor, and Gorgias ; and sixty thousand foot and five thousand horse, under the command of Lysias, the viceroy of Syria, who was forced to retreat from the Jewish territories to Antioch, with great loss, confusion, and disgrace. Judas Machabeus, seeing his arms crowned with such wonderful success, and having no enemy now upon his hands, turned his thoughts upon repairing the devastations which the Gentiles had made in the country. His first object was the house of God ; he cleansed the sanctuary, threw down the altar on which the idol of Jupiter had stood, built a new altar, appointed priests of an unblemished character for the performance of the sacrifices, and provided every other thing that was necessary for the divine service. The neighbouring nations took offence at his repairing the Temple of the living God, and sent great forces into the field against him ; but Judas scoured the whole country with a rapidity of success which distinguished him for a favorite of Heaven, and he discomfited his enemies wherever he met them. He stormed their fortresses, reduced their cities, and frequently routed their powerful armies, without losing a single man ; for the Lord of Hosts was with him, and holy angels visibly protected him more than once in battle. In an attack he made upon Gorgias, the governor of Idumea, some of his soldiers fell, because they had forfeited the divine protection at the sacking of Jamnia, by taking and hiding under their clothes some pagan donaries (2 Mac. xii.) contrary to the law. The religious Judas, grieved

at the sin his men had been guilty of, but still hoping that they might find mercy, on account of the piety they had shewn in dying for their country and religion, he made a collection of twelve thousand drachms of silver, which he sent to Jerusalem, that prayer and sacrifice might be offered for them. *Holy, therefore, (says the sacred text,) and salutary is the thought of praying for the dead, that they may be released from their sins.* For to sins already remitted a temporal punishment is sometimes reserved, as it appears in Nathan's speech to king David, (2 Kings xii.) and from that temporal punishment Judas hoped, by prayer and sacrifice, to release his deceased friends and fellow warriors.

During these transactions in Judea, Antiochus, being informed of the bad fortune which had attended the arms of his generals, vowed revenge against the Jews, and declared he would reduce Jerusalem to a heap of ruins, and make it a common burying place of the whole Jewish nation. But the arm of God stopt him short in his career, and, by a just judgment, he ended a wicked life by a miserable death. The shew he made of a Death-bed Repentance, proves both the deceitfulness and inefficacy of a sorrow which is extorted only by pain, and comes not from the heart. The grace of dying well is, in the common course of Providence, granted to those only who, by a virtuous life, endeavour to obtain it. A repentance deferred to the last hour, though accompanied with all the verbal protestations of Antiochus, is not to be relied upon. A Christian who, by a deliberate neglect, throws himself into that extremity, has no better grounds for his hope of pardon than had that reprobate King. The sentence of

St. Augustine upon this subject deserves our notice: 'Do you desire to die well? says he; 'you then must live well; for whoever leads a 'good life cannot meet with a bad death—a good 'death being the recompense of a good life.'

The death of Antiochus Epiphanes ended not the war, nor the calamities of the Jewish people; the Syrian generals still strove to subdue the country for their new king, Antiochus Eupator, who succeeded his father both in his crown and antipathy against the Jews. Judas Machabeus headed his victorious troops against them, and in different battles vanquished Gorgias, Timotheus, and Lysias. Some time after, an army of an hundred thousand foot and twenty thousand horse invaded Judea, with two-and-thirty elephants, trained to war, bearing each upon his back a strong wooden tower, and garrisoned with two-and-thirty warriors. Judas Machabeus was not daunted at the sight of an army, no less formidable for the glittering armour than for the number of its men. With his usual courage and confidence in God he led forth his troops to battle; he fought, and slew great numbers of the enemy. Eleazar, his younger brother, signalized himself by a very singular act of magnanimity; for having observed an elephant more remarkable than the rest for his size and glittering armour, and supposing that Antiochus Eupator might be upon the back of it, he generously resolved to sacrifice his life for the sake of finishing the war, if he could, with one stroke; he cut his way through the thickest of his enemies, till he reached the elephant he had in view, and standing under it, he vigorously thrust his sword into its belly, on which the monster fell down, and crushed the conqueror to death in the

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very act of triumph. Such feats of uncommon bravery gave king Antiochus no great encouragement to carry on the war.—Provisions also growing scarce in the land, as it was the sabbath year, he concluded a treaty of peace with Judas Machabeus, and retired with his army into Syria, where he was shortly after deprived both of his crown and life by Demetrius, the son of Seleucus.

Demetrius nominated Alcimus, a wicked and ambitious man, to the high priesthood, and employed him, in conjunction with Bacchides, as the minister of his designs against Judea; but Judas Machabeus by his activity forced them to relinquish their enterprise, and retreat with dishonour into Syria. (1 Mac. c. vii. and 2 Mac. c. xiv.) Nicanor, an active general, and sworn enemy to the Jewish nation, being afterwards sent at the head of a powerful army from Syria, Judas Machabeus marched against him, full of confidence, and worsted him in two engagements, with the loss of near five thousand Syrians in the first, and of five and thirty thousand in the second; among whom was Nicanor himself; his head and right arm, which he had insolently lifted up against the Temple, were severed from his body and carried to Jerusalem; and his tongue, which had uttered blasphemies against the Most High, was cut into small pieces and given to the birds. This victory was the last of Judas Machabeus; for his little army being wearied by the length and disheartened by the labours of a war, to which they saw no end, began to decline the service, except eight hundred, who remained with him. With this little troop he fought an army of two and twenty thousand Syrians from morning till evening, when after forcing their right wing he put it to flight, but

pursuing them too far he was closed in by the left wing, and overpowered by numbers.

Judas Machabeus was succeeded by his brother Jonathan, who was chosen by general consent to fight the battles of Israel. But trusting himself to a pretended friend, whose interest it was to betray him, he was traitorously taken and put to the sword with both his sons, in the city of Ptolemais, to which Tryphon had invited him under the specious show of friendship. Of the five gallant sons of Mathathias, Simon was now the only one left for the defence of Judea in her distress.—He governed the Jewish nation with great wisdom and steadiness for eight years, when Ptolemy his son-in-law, being instigated with a wicked desire of power, conspired against and deprived him of life. Simon was succeeded both in the sacerdotal and civil power, by his son John, who from a victory, which he gained over the Hyrcanians, obtained the surname of *Hyrcanus*. Hyrcanus having besieged and taken Samaria, razed their temple to the ground. He left the sovereign power to his son Aristobulus, who was the first that assumed the crown and title of king. Hence the government of the Jewish nation remained in the family of the Machabees, and the regal sceptre was translated from one to another of their descendants. But their power was of no long continuance, for the Romans, who were already masters of a great part of the world, conquered the East under the conduct of Pompey, and ruined at the same time the power of the kings of Syria, and of the kings of the Jews.

About this period started up the sects of the *Pharisees* and *Sadducees*. The *Pharisees* were so called from their Separation, because they sepa-

rated themselves from the rest of the people, and pretended to observe the law with greater exactness; but for the most part, they were proud and avaricious hypocrites, who deceived the people with an appearance of devotion and feigned piety.—The *Sadducees* were so called from Saddoch, the chief of their sect. They denied the resurrection of the dead, the immortality of the soul, and believed not that there were angels or spirits.—In this period may be also placed the origin of the *Hellenists*, a name given to all the Jews dispersed through Greece and other parts, who read the Greek version of the Scriptures in their Synagogues.—Frequent mention is also made of the *Assideans*, *Therapeutæ* or *Essenes*, of the *Scribes*, *Samaritans*, *Proselytes of justice*, *Proselytes of the gate*, *Publicans*, *Herodians*, &c.—The *Assideans* were a set of men that led a religious life, and were zealous for the law and worship of God.—The *Essenes* took their name from contemplation, and were plain unmarried men, who despised worldly pleasures and meditated on heavenly things.—The *Scribes* were Doctors of the Jewish Law.—The *Samaritans* were a medley of people descended from those Assyrians, that had been sent by Salmanazer to inhabit the ruined kingdom of Israel, and who intermarried with the remnant of the ten tribes, which they found there. At first they adored their idols along with the true God. They were always separated from the Jews, who looked upon them as Schismatics, and held them in great abhorrence.—They received only the books of Moyses, rejected all the prophecies, and pretended that God was to be adored on the mountain of *Garizim*, where they had built a temple; the Jews, who inhabited Palestine, believing on the contrary

that God could no where be rightly worshiped but in Jerusalem only.—The *proselytes of justice* admitted of circumcision in common with the other Jews, but others, who regardless of rites and ceremonies, worshipped the God of the Hebrews, were called *proselytes of the gate*.—The *publicans* were tax gatherers, appointed by the Romans to collect the impositions laid upon the Jews.—The *Herodians* accommodated themselves to the times, that they might not offend the Romans by shewing too great a zeal for religion. Some think they were called *Herodians*, because they acknowledged Herod the Great to be the Messiah.—It is evident from Pagan as well as Jewish authors, that the Eastern world did about that time expect a Deliverer, who was to enlighten them with his heavenly doctrine; and to rescue mankind by his Divine grace from the bondage of sin. All sorts of vice prevailed then upon the earth; and the corruption of manners was almost universal. The true God was only adored by the Jews. Idolatry reigned throughout all other nations. The Grecians and Romans adored *Jupiter, Mars, Bacchus, Juno, Venus*, with a multiplicity of other false Gods and Goddesses. In Egypt they adored *Isis* in the figure of a woman, with the head of a cow. In others countries they worshipped beasts, monsters, and the works of their own hands. They deified dead men, and figured to themselves an infinity of imaginary Gods, to whom they gave different names, and of whom the poets recounted a thousand ridiculous fables in order to entertain the people. The Philosophers both of Greece and Rome, were sensible of the absurdity of these Fables, which were the whole foundation of their false religion, but they durst not openly declare their

sentiments, Some indeed of the wisest amongst them admired the Jewish religion, and took pleasure in searching into their law, by which means they at length came to the knowledge of its Divine author.

Thus by a disposition of Providence, the dispersion of the Jews through various distant nations and their intermixture with them, contributed to make the Gentiles sensible of the gross errors of idolatry and superstition, and to spread the knowledge of the true God by degrees in the very midst of paganism.

Amongst the Jews themselves, some were Spiritual, and others were Carnal Jews. Both the one and the other saw clearly and agreed that the ancient Prophecies were then fulfilled, and that the Time appointed for the Coming of the Messiah was approaching.—But they differed herein, that the Spiritual Jews expected from him far greater blessings than the perishable goods of this world, and hoped for a better life after the resurrection; but the Carnal Jews were wholly attached to the things of this transitory life, and considered the Prophecies, which spoke in Figures of the Messiah's triumphs and glory, according to the bare Letter. They erroneously imagined that he would reign here on earth, like other kings in the enjoyment of riches, honors, and pleasures, and that he would be a greater warrior than David, and surpass Solomon in opulence and worldly grandeur. Such were the mistaken notions of the carnal Jews. Such was the condition of the world; such was the face of the earth, when the Son of God honored it with his Divine presence and conversation, and came to save man, who deserved nothing at his hands but eternal torments.

The Regal Sceptre transferred from the line of Juda to the Herodian family.

HEROD, surnamed the Great, found means to transfer the government of the Jewish nation from the Asmonean family to his own. At first he sided with Brutus and Cassius; but, after their death, he came over to Mark Antony, who made him governor of Judea, and king of the Jews, by order of the Roman Senate, and the favour of Julius Cæsar. After the defeat of Antony at Actium, Herod turned about to Augustus, who confirmed his titles and added three more provinces to his dominions, because he had erected a theatre, and established quinquennial games, in honour of him. He was a constant flatterer of the emperor, and artfully secured the favour and protection of the Roman people. He was a Jew by religion, or at least he made profession of being so, though he often scoffed the Jewish religion, and made and unmade High Priests at pleasure. Under his reign, the Temple of Jerusalem was either restored from its foundation, or else adorned in so costly a manner, that it was esteemed one of the most stupendous works of that age. However it is certain, that Herod was by birth an Idumean, as Josephus, whose testimony is unexceptionable, informs us in his history, where he relates how his father Antipas, chose, rather to be called by the Greek name *Antipater*, and was made, by king Alexander Jannæus, governor of his own country, Idumea. Consequently Herod, being of a foreign race and descent, the sceptre of Juda failed, when he was raised to the throne, as a leader of Jacob's line no longer presided over the Jewish people. For the princes of the Asmonean or Jewish royal family were excluded and entirely cut off by Herod, who stripped them of all their other civil rights, as he likewise did the principal members of the Sanhedrim or great council, by which that nation governed itself by its own laws, under its kings. The term foretold by the holy Patriarch Jacob to his son Juda for the Coming of the Messiah, was therefore at hand, and the Seventy Weeks of Years mentioned by Daniel, were near being accomplished. Hence Christ, the eternal Son of God, and the expectation of nations, was then for us men born in Bethlehem, a town of Juda, and slain in the middle of the seventieth week; and

his death was followed by the destruction of the city and temple of Jerusalem, and the dispersion of the Jewish people, who therefore are obliged to confess, that the time foretold by the prophets for the coming of the Messiah, is long since elapsed.

It was in the thirty-seventh year of king Herod's reign, and the four thousandth of the World, that Christ was born. Herod, after his birth, gave orders for every male child that had been born within two years in and about Bethlehem, to be killed. He was one of the most cruel tyrants in the world, and murdered his own offspring and his best friends. His kingdom was divided after his death, between Herod Antipas, and his brothers Archelaus and Philip. Each division was called a tetrarchy, or fourth part, and the brothers governed under the title of tetrarchs. Antipas was the Herod who ordered John the Baptist to be beheaded, by the persuasion of Herodias, his brother Philip's wife. It was to him also that Pilate sent our blessed Lord. Archelaus was a cruel man and hated by the Jews. Antipas was afterwards banished to Lyons and Archelaus to Vienna.—Herod the Third or Agrippa the Elder, was then declared prince of all Judea, by the favour of the Romans.—It was under him that James the Apostle suffered martyrdom.—Herod the Fourth, or Agrippa the Younger, governed under the Roman emperor Claudius, who annexed Judea once more to Syria, and made it a Roman province.—In fine, in the days of Herod the Fifth, or Herod Agrippa, Jerusalem was besieged, taken, and utterly destroyed, together with the Temple, and the whole Jewish nation was dispersed; the new spiritual kingdom of the Messiah, which is to last during the Seventh age or to the end of the world, being then established and founded upon a Rock, against which the gates of Hell shall never be able to prevail.

END OF SIXTH AGE,

AND OF

HISTORY OF THE OLD TESTAMENT.

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